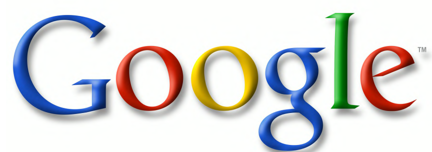

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"MY HEART'S IN THE HIGHLANDS."

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The Keeper of the Vineyard

A TALE OF THE OZARKS

By

CAROLINE ABBOT STANLEY

Author of
"Order No. 11," "The Master of 'The Oaks,'" etc.

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To
One brave woman in the Ozarks

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I

FATHERLESS, MOTHERLESS, PENNILESS

WASHINGTON, D. C., August 3, 19—.

MISS MADGE DIXON,

Chautauqua, New York.

DEAR MADGE:—Just one month to-day since that dreadful telegram came that separated us and brought me here. It seems ages! I can hardly persuade myself I am the same person that started off so blithely with you in June for a summer vacation. Isn't it strange how one little scrap of yellow paper can revolutionize a life! That day I was a care-free girl—yes, a girl, even if I do have to own up to thirty-three years, for I never had had anything to age me or tone down my over-abundant spirits. Not even the Harrison Street School had done that. I had only myself to provide for, and as you know I took pretty light views of life and its responsibilities.

But to-day I am a woman, harassed with the doubts and fears of middle age; peering into the future with anxious eyes; and with four hungry children looking to me for bread. Nothing sobers one like that.

I sent you papers at the time of my brother's death. I have had no time since for writing. But I did appreciate

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your good letter and your urging me to pour out all my troubles into your sympathetic ears. I fear I may overwork that offer, for I have no one to go to now but you, my tried and trusted friend, and I feel sometimes as if I must have an outlet for my apprehensions or be swept away by them.

You see, the children depend on me for everything. Of course that puts me on my mettle and buoys up my strength—*they* don't know I am faint-hearted—but sometimes I do want desperately to creep into the arms of somebody that is stronger than I and sob out my fears, and be comforted.

It isn't just a matter of bereavement with me, though I loved my brother and shall feel his loss, and it *is* a lonely thing to realize that I am in the forefront now alone. Young as I am, I am the last of my generation in my own family. My father and mother are gone, and as they were only children I have neither uncles, aunts, nor cousins. Anyway, cousins are not much if that is the only tie between you.

Madge, I am literally alone in the world with these children. *And I don't know what to do with them!* That is the naked truth, and the thing that is weighing me down. I feel the responsibility so and I am so poorly prepared for it. Of course I know how to manage boys. I think I am not egotistical in saying that, for you know the worst cases in school were always handed over to me when there was any excuse at all for doing it, and the experiences I have gone through in the Harrison Street

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School would almost fit one to fight with wild beasts at Ephesus! But I could always lay that responsibility down at four o'clock. This I take to bed with me and rise up with in the morning. I ask myself twenty times a day and forty in the night watches: What shall I do with these children?

Thus far the answer hasn't come.

One thing I am determined upon. I shall never desert them. We will go down together if we must. It was suggested to me by one person here—a cousin of the children's mother—that I put one of them into an orphan asylum. She has never repeated the suggestion. By the time I got through with her my determination to shoulder the responsibility, and my faith that somehow I should be able to carry it, were both considerably strengthened. Strange, what opposition will do in clearing a befogged atmosphere and giving a clean-cut vision of duty!

You see, my brother, who was for many years a government clerk here, died, leaving nothing but a spotless name and a memory that will be sweet and fragrant always to his children. That is a great deal—more than millions without it—but it won't support a family! However, it is not so much the financial burden that weighs me down—though I imagine it will strain my salary to the breaking point to stretch it around five persons—but *I don't know what to do with them.*

Bess is a dear, sweet girl, nearly eighteen. She would be no problem at all. I could take her with me to

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Chicago, put her in school for one year, and then with one more in the training school she would be self-supporting and able to help the others. But the next two are boys—Tom, fourteen, and Hunter, twelve years old—the age when Dr. Vincent says a boy has no friend but his mother and his God. They are good boys too, but what could I do with them in the city? I couldn't let them be on the streets and I couldn't keep them off.

Then there is Juddie, the cunningest, lovingest little chap that ever crept into one's heart—and five years old! Just a baby! I'd have to hire a nurse for him in Chicago, I being away all day, or put him into a day nursery—and I think I see myself doing that! He is the one the relative thought should be put into an orphanage. Well! when he snuggles up in my arms and looks with his big eyes into mine and says, with just a suspicion of a quiver, "You're my mamma now, isn't you, Aunt Nell?" I know he will never go to an asylum for orphans until I am in one for incurables!

Madge, it opens all the pores of your soul to have a child turn to you like that! I can see now what it is that makes mother-love the unselfish thing it is. I've never had the deepening, steadying influence of this sort of thing before and I've suffered from the lack. The glass has been held up to me startlingly in the last few weeks! I have been self-centred; I have thought only of myself and my own pleasures and my own improvement—along legitimate lines, it is true—art and music and travel—but selfish, for all that.

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Of course I had always sent brother and Jane nice presents for themselves and the children, but I had never really helped them with the growing burden of this family as I ought to have done—with my salary what it was. I have never helped other people as you have, Madge. That is why I could always dress better—you've often remarked upon that, you know. I have been lavish with myself and counted it generous spending. But it was without thought of others. I see it now. I can see so many ways in which I might have eased the burden a little here—and I did not do it, because I didn't think.

More than all else, when Jane died last spring I failed to appreciate the overwhelming weight that was laid upon my brother. Had I done so I should have gone to him at the close of school instead of going off to Chautauqua with you. I remember you looked surprised when I told you it was too hot to go to Washington in the summertime.

And now it is too late even to tell him that I am sorry. Madge, some lines of Adelaide Proctor's (I think they are hers, I am not sure) keep ringing in my ears:

> "Out of sight and out of reach they go,
> Those close familiar friends that loved us so,
> And sitting in the shadow they have left,
> Alone with loneliness and sore bereft,
> We think with vain regret of some fond word
> That once we might have said, and they have heard."

And with me it is not just the unspoken word; it is the deed that was lacking—the standing shoulder to

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shoulder with him in his extremity. Ah, well! this is indeed "vain regret." There is no reason why I should sadden you with it all. I only want you to know that I am realizing what a lot of lost opportunities are laid up against me. After all, it may have its uses. I failed my brother, but I shall not fail his children.

August 6th.

I have been going over James's papers hoping to find something that can be turned to account. The best I can tell you is that thus far we have found no debts. I am not surprised at this. It had always been my brother James's habit to get what he could pay for and do without the rest. We were brought up on that principle.

There was a small sum, a few hundred dollars, in bank that was being saved, I gathered, for some special purpose. What it was I have not yet found out, but I suppose I shall later. It doesn't matter much anyway, for it will be mostly swept away by doctor's bills and funeral expenses. The undertakers do gouge one so! Naturally, nobody wants to haggle over money at such a time, and the bills are made out with this fact in view.

But if I didn't find debts I found other things that wrung my heart. James was always systematic. He left account books for years and years back, showing just what he had received and how it had been spent. At the beginning of every year was a hopeful plan outlined of how the money was to be apportioned and how much could be saved. At the close was always a brief

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explanation of why it hadn't been done. Growing needs, rising prices; birth, sickness, and death (all expensive); household demands that *must* be met—a carpet to be replaced or a bed demanded by a growing family; and in the latter years a frantic effort to keep up insurance premiums since other savings were impossible. Madge, it all made a heart-breaking story to one who could read between the lines. It would prove an interesting document marked "Exhibit A" in the case of the clerks against the government, and would throw some light on the "loan shark" discussion.

The "loan shark," you know, is the sympathetic gentleman who hunts you out and sends you cheering letters when your time of financial stress comes, offering to lend you in the strictest confidence any amount, without security, without publicity, without trouble of any kind, if only you will let him assist you—and all for the small sum of three per cent.! That seems very little when you are in desperate need, and you accept his generous offer—to find later when the shark shows his teeth that of course it was *three per cent. a month!* Well, there is quite a difference between three per cent. and thirty-six, and the victim sweats blood before he is out of the clutches of his kind friend.

They are put out of business now, but they hadn't been in my brother's time of stress—alas! At the time of the discussion of that bill well-fed Congressmen rose to declare that the clerks borrowed money from these harpies for purposes of speculation, to play the races,

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etc. Perhaps—some. But not a few did it for purposes of investment—in a pine coffin, little or big, and six feet of earth just outside the potter's field.

I found in the account book a brief note of the time James fell into their hands. I remember it. I helped him pay that debt, and it is one of the few of my money dealings I recall to-day with pleasure. It was the time he had appendicitis and went to the hospital. Nobody on a starving salary ought ever to have appendicitis! For a poor man—a government clerk—to have the appendix and three hundred dollars carved bodily out of his anatomy at one clip is suicidal! Brother couldn't afford it. But neither could he afford to die for want of it. If he had been a Senator he might have risked it, for then if the worst had come he would have had a forty-thousand-dollar funeral with a year's salary for his wife. When a clerk dies his widow gets him a cheap coffin—if she can—and his family goes to the wall.

Madge, do you know about these Congressional funerals that we all help pay for? Well, I've known as many as forty-one Congressmen appointed to convey one dead man to a far-distant State and see him safely buried. That in addition to the Sergeant-at-Arms who actually does the business. The others go to represent the sympathy of their respective bodies and uphold the dignity of Congress. If it takes forty-one mourners to do this wouldn't you think the dignity and grief of each individual must be rather attenuated?

To my mind, one really representative member from

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each house would be more weighty than forty-one who had an itching desire to see that part of the country or to look after their political fences. You know about how much sackcloth and ashes would be worn on a "funeral junket" like that (honestly, that is what they are called!) and how much bread and *water* these men would be likely to consume! This may sound bitter and flippant, Madge, but I am heart-sore over the revelations of hope deferred in those account books. And the reason it is deferred is because Congress always has a spasm of retrenchment when it gets back from a junket and finds the subject of the clerks' salaries up.

I remember so well when brother got this position in Washington. We all thought, out in Missouri, that he was on the highroad to fortune and preferment. It proved a treadmill instead, with neither in sight.

I find this note in the book a few years back: "Help is coming! Congress has increased its own salaries one-third, assigning as a reason the greatly increased cost of living. Since that applies equally to all, they cannot in common justice fail to raise ours."

No, not in *common justice!* But they did fail.

Again I find: "The salaries of the Supreme Court Justices have been raised on account of the increased cost of living. They tell us our turn will come next."

It didn't, Madge! Nor after the Army officers' raise. Nor the Naval officers'! Nor the *high-priced* civilians'! The *salaries of the rank and file of government clerks have not been raised in fifty years!* Has the cost of liv-

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ing increased in that time for the great middle class? Well!—ask any housekeeper that feeds her family on round steak. You won't need to go to the porterhouse class!

Toward the last of the book I found this item: "It is recommended that the salary of the President's private secretary be raised to ten thousand dollars." And then follows this pathetic comment: "Ten thousand! When will ours be raised to a living rate? If it isn't soon, I am afraid I must go under."

And when Jane was sick so long and died he *did* go under, for he had to let his life insurance go after struggling for years to keep it up,—and the children were robbed of their patrimony. Oh, Madge, it makes me heart-sick to think of it all!

And when the subject is agitated in Congress, as it is periodically, for they are not all callous, some astute statesman always rises to remark, just as if it had never been remarked before (I suppose each one thinks it is original with him), "If these people don't like their jobs, let them get out."

Ah! if only they could! But when a man has been held down for the productive years of his life to a bare subsistence it is hard for him to have accumulated anything on which to "get out"—except out of life.

That my brother's thoughts had been much on a way of escape I am sure from the number of "back to the farm" letters and circulars I have found, and also from what Bess tells me. She says he told her once, after her

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mother's death, that he was trying to arrange to go away from Washington—that he would tell her all about it when things were a little more settled. Once during his illness, just before he lapsed into unconsciousness, he whispered to me as I bent over him: " Nell, don't let the boys go into government service. Get them to the farm." I thought then he was delirious, but since reading these account books I know he meant every word of it. Whose farm did he mean? and what was the scheme he had on foot?

I have found a number of documents marked " Farm Homes Association," which I have put away carefully. When I get to it I am going through them to see what they are. So many from one source makes me wonder. In the meantime, the question remains unanswered:

The children—*what shall I do with them?*

I will write you when I know the answer. Probably before! Do send me a letter soon.

Yours faithfully,

ELEANOR DINWOODY.

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II

"WHICH SHALL IT BE?"

WASHINGTON, D. C., August 6, 19—.

DEAR MADGE:—I certainly have something startling enough to communicate this time! But alas! instead of simplifying matters it complicates them. If I was in the depths when I wrote last I am in the air now. But let me tell it connectedly.

From the first I have felt there was something significant about all this "Farm Homes" literature. I have found out now what it is. This morning Bess brought me a package of letters she had found tucked away among some of her mother's things. They were from brother to Jane, written a year ago from the Ozarks, down in southern Missouri where he had gone for his vacation—a hunting trip, as I understood it. And so it was—but not for game.

It seems that for some time he had been looking into a colonization scheme by which a certain Farm Homes Association proposes to bring together "the landless man and the manless land," to quote General Booth. After studying their literature he was greatly attracted by the proposed plan, but, of course, he had too much sense to go into a thing like that without investigation, so he took this trip down to the Ozarks to find out for himself.

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His letters to Jane were full of enthusiasm about the country and hope for the future, with a touching undercurrent of longing for the land. "I want my boys to become masters of the soil," he wrote in one place, "instead of bond-slaves to a system as I have been." You see, Madge, we were raised on a farm—(no, not "brought up" but "raised"! Everything in Missouri is raised—from mules to Presidential candidates)—and a love of it is in the blood, I suppose. I know it is in mine. I always get homesick in the spring for the pussy-willows and the Peter-birds. I want, before I die, to get to a region where the English sparrows are *not* and the bluebirds *are*. I knew exactly how brother felt and how the fields and the forests and the wood-birds called him. And it was most natural that it should have been the call to a Missouri farm that sounded loudest in his ears. Missouri was his childhood's home. Those cords are not easily ravelled out.

He did not minimize the disadvantages of the region in his letters. He told Jane it was isolated, with a scarcity of railroads, and but few people that could be called neighbours, but if the plan of the Association succeeded there would soon be no lack of either.

Well, at this point I laid aside the letters to interview the literature and see for myself what their plan was. Briefly, it is this:

They secure large tracts—1600 or 1800 acres—in a place where land is within reach of poor people, but taking care to see that it is productive. (Brother

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couldn't have touched the farm lands of our native county with a forty-foot pole, for that is one of the richest river counties.) This tract they divide into 40-acre farms, leaving one central farm of 60 acres on which are to be located the blacksmith shop, the store, the creamery and cannery (which are to do up the colonists' milk and vegetables), the school, the hall (doesn't that sound promising?), and the *silo.*

Madge, do you know what a silo is? I know you don't, for I didn't. Silos have come in since I left the farm. I thought it might be a sort of house of refuge for those who had tried this kind of co-operative farming and failed,—having a long-sighted idea that there might be a few of that kind limping around at the end of a year or two. But a silo is not that. For exact information I refer you to Webster—late edition—*and resume.*

These 40-acre farms are designed for intensive farming and are sold to properly certified applicants on easy terms—one initial payment, just as an evidence of good faith, they say—and the rest in ten instalments, one each year—"'scusin'" of the trying second year, as my old black mammy would have said. They admit that that year is apt to be a discouraging one. It was then that I supposed the "silo" would come into play for the knocked-out dentists and salesmen, and so forth.

Well, the land alone would not do much for the impecunious would-be farmer, so the Company agrees to put up a house, a barn, and a hen-house for him and to

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furnish him with stock, farming implements, fencing, etc., on the same terms—easy payments with low rate of interest. It seems almost too good to be true, but it is down in black and white.

And that isn't all. At the outset they send a scientific agriculturist to the place who studies the situation, finds out to what the soil is especially adapted, and gives to each colonist when he buys his land a blue-print setting forth all this so fully that the wayfaring man, though a fool, may read—and put in his crop accordingly. Then on the central farm is to reside a good practical farmer who is there "to demonstrate but not dictate; to co-operate with but not command."

I like that and I could see how James would like it, for we never either of us submitted very gracefully to dictation.

Now as to the bearing of all this upon the present situation. After finding out what the scheme was and the advantages it conferred I went back to the letters. They told Jane of an opportunity which had presented itself that James felt to be particularly favourable.

A German from down about Hermann, where they are famous vine-growers, had been the first one to enroll in this colony. His house, barn, and hen-house were provided for him as agreed, even to a good wine-cellar which his business demanded, for he intended ultimately to make wine. He had put out his vineyard and was getting things in good shape (you know these Germans are thrifty), when unfortunately he sickened and died,

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leaving his farm only partly paid for. It had to be taken back by the Company and was again for sale. James wrote that he was seriously contemplating its purchase. What did Jane think? He would have to pay more, but this he was willing to do in consideration of having a vineyard about ready to come into bearing by the time he should be able to go to Missouri. It would afford a place where the boys, even at their age, could be immediately put to work. (I pricked up my ears at this, for a place where they could be put to work seems to me at present the great desideratum.)

Jane must have approved, for the next letter told that the bargain had been sealed and the first payment made. A good big one it was, too. I can understand now why things are so run down in this house. They have been saving every cent for this. Well—I went to work then like a Turk to find a record of that payment and the receipt for it. We found it—all this had been kept in a separate book—and not only that but receipts for the cash purchase of a horse and spring wagon, a cow, and a few tools that had been the German's own and had been offered by his widow at such a bargain that they had been bought on the spot and left with Mr. Burson for safe keeping. I don't know who Mr. Burson is, but we imagine—Bess and I—that he is the safe and sane farmer that everybody is to depend upon.

Well, Madge, you are now in possession of all the facts that are known to us about this thing. I have detailed them circumstantially because I want your advice.

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You can see how all this would upset me. I had about made up my mind that there was nothing to do but to take the children to Chicago; but now, knowing that somewhere in my own dear State there is waiting for them a farm partly paid for—which payments must be forfeited if they are not kept up; partly stocked (one cow and a horse are not much out in the vicinity of the Chicago stockyards, I know, but they are worth something to the Dinwoodys at this juncture); and partly under a kind of cultivation especially suited to women and children,—all this, I say, makes me wonder if I can afford to let this go. Would it be chimerical for me to try to carry out my brother's wishes and take these children down to the Ozarks?

I forgot to tell you that there is a school which undoubtedly I could secure. James said in one of the letters that Mr. Burson told him one of their first needs would be a teacher, and he seemed to think favorably of Bess. Well, if Bess, who knows nothing on earth about teaching, could have secured that school, certainly I, with my experience and my testimonials, would not be turned down. Bess doesn't want it and I do. For if worst came to worst I know I could always fight the wolf from the door with an arithmetic and a spelling-book!

I wrote to Mr. Burson at once to know if the place was still open, telling him I was a sister of James Dinwoody and giving him a broad hint of my qualifications, but never a word about my brother's death and my position

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as the head of his household. You know how men distrust a woman's ability to do anything out of the beaten track. I was afraid he might say I couldn't go to the Ozarks!

Later.

We have been talking this over with the boys. I feel that they are old enough to be consulted—with the distinct understanding that their opinion is not to count a feather's weight. It would have been a great help if James had talked more freely with Bess, but I suppose he thought there would be time enough for that, as he did not think of going out until next spring, I find.

Of course they are wild to go. It is exactly the kind of thing that would appeal to boys twelve and fourteen. I am assuring them that there will be much hard work in it for us all, and much self-denial; but of course they see nothing but hunting and fishing and larks of various kinds. Tom is at this moment cleaning his father's gun, which fortunately he has been taught to use. And Hunter is on a still hunt for fishing tackle. Oh, I wish I knew what to do! It does not seem as if it would be such a dreadful risk with this wise and beneficent Company back of us. And I am tired of battling with humanity—the "coons," "sheenies," and "dagoes" of the Harrison Street School. I believe I would rather fight against Nature's forces for a while.

I should miss you, Madge, dreadfully; and our rides to and from school; but then I would have your letters. In

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the country I should have plenty of time to write. Sometimes I think I should like to get away from everything in the world but the mountains and fields and streams. There are all of these down there and so far as I can ascertain not much else; but I don't believe I should mind that one bit. I have seen enough crowds in Chicago to last me comfortably the rest of my life. . . . I wonder if we could make a living on a farm. The boys will be getting larger every year. They are growing like weeds in June. And with such appetites, I don't wonder. Madge, those boys are perfect boa constrictors! I don't believe any boarding-house keeper in Chicago would take them. Well, she might *take* them, but I am sure she wouldn't *keep* them! I believe I'd better take them down to the Ozarks. At any rate, I will stop now and go down to the Library and see what I can find out there. In the meantime, Madge dear, you may picture me in your dreams as jumping from peak to peak like the chamois in the old geographies!

Later.

Madge Dixon! Do you know where the Ozarks are? and what they are? I know you don't. You think they are a small and insignificant range of mountains in southwest Missouri, just as they are laid down on the maps, and as I always supposed they were until I started to study this subject seriously. And I a Missourian! Well, that is the best the "mapologers" can do at representing anything out of the ordinary. Now I will pro-

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ceed to give you a lesson in geography that will surprise you as much as it did me.

The Ozarks are not a little range of mountains at all, but a vast uplifted mountain plateau extending across southern Missouri and the northwest portion of Arkansas for a distance of one hundred and fifty miles one way and two hundred the other. This makes about 30,000 square miles—as much as the whole of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and the greater part of Vermont. (I am speaking of the land surface. There is so much watered stock in these Atlantic States that it is only fair to squeeze it dry before comparing it with inland territory.)

It has enough unused water power, they say (you will perceive that this is F. H. literature), in the shape of mammoth springs and swift-flowing rivers to turn the spindles of all New England. The Association is rapturous over the climate, fertility of the soil, and its adaptation to "fruits, fowls, and other kinds of fresh fish," as our huckster has on his wagon. They mention stones, but only casually—very casually—and in a way to indicate that they are no drawback to tillage. (Paper tillage, I suppose they mean.)

I am a doubting Thomas here. Many things I take down whole as I would a capsule, but not loose stones as fertilizers. My grandfather was from New Hampshire! I've heard him tell of the backaches he had in later life from merely passing a stone fence. Mountains there are too on this great plateau, but so dwarfed—so

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I gather—from the long running jump they had to take before they became mountains that they barely escape being hills.

The volubility of the Farm Homes Association over the country is more than matched by their taciturnity as to population. I looked that up for myself. I went down to the Carnegie Library and found a book on Missouri that was a veritable mine of information. It gave among other things the area of all the counties and their population. It did not tell how many persons there were to the square mile, but I made the calculation. Madge, in some counties of that vast region there are only nine persons to the square mile! How is that for density? It seems rather lonesome to a girl from Chicago, as it might to a New Yorker, where in some portions of the East Side there are 1750 souls (and bodies) to the acre!

I fell to thinking about schools, naturally. What manner of educational institutions could they have with nine persons—men, women, and children—to the square mile? It would be a rare place for the kind of university it was said Mark Hopkins could conjure out of the wilderness—a log with a student at one end and himself at the other. But would we find a Mark there?

And churches?

You know, Madge, I am not a very faithful church-goer, for all my godly heritage. I have found them chiefly convenient to stay away from in my adult life,—a fact that you have sometimes mourned over, I remem-

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ber. But churches seem suddenly to loom large on the horizon. They are good things to have around when you are rearing a family. I am convinced of that. I shouldn't like to part with my early training by a Christian father and mother in the shadow of a church, much as I have departed from it. And here I am thinking of taking my children into the wilderness away from them. Is it a wise thing to do or not? . . . I don't know . . . Madge, I cannot tell. I only know their father begged me with his dying breath to take them away from the city and to this place. . . . But if he had been there there would soon have been a church—I know that—as there was in old pioneer days in Missouri with our God-fearing forefathers!

Still later.

Madge, we're going! right into the heart of that 30,000 square miles! Does it make your hair stand on end? It does mine when I wake in a cold sweat about two o'clock in the morning trying to figure out what I will do when Juddie has the croup! But we are going! It is settled. Maybe there will be a doctor among the colonists. *Heavens!* I hope so!

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III

THE DINWOODYS STRIKE A SNAG

IT was just two weeks after the date of this letter that Eleanor Dinwoody and her newly acquired family stood on the platform of the little station in the Ozarks which was to be the point of departure from the railroad for their new home. That goal lay a long day's journey into the wilderness, and the road was lengthening moment by moment.

The decision had not been reached without deep thought and much consultation with family friends; but when it was made they lost no time. Everything called for haste. The house must be vacated before another month's rent was due; and time allowed for freight delays. Besides which, the school was waiting. A letter was despatched to Mr. Burson, who, they found from the letters, was really the superintendent as they had supposed, notifying him of their intention to come and asking that wagons be sent to the railroad to meet them on a date specified, as the circulars had promised. In this letter Miss Dinwoody apprised Mr. Burson of her brother's death, but stated definitely that she would meet all his obligations and take the entire responsibility.

With the soul-racking work of decision over they entered eagerly upon the task of preparation and packing,

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which was largely a process of elimination and substitution, of culling out what could be spared and putting into the smallest compass that which must be retained. Fortunately they were young. This lessened the heart strain.

"Do you think we can take the piano, Aunt Nell?" Bess inquired, anxiously.

"Certainly. Your supreme enjoyment is in that piano, and you will need it now as never before. Because I am going to take you into the wilderness is no sign that I contemplate cutting you off from all the refinements of life. Yes, we will take the piano, and the books (after sifting), and the pictures,—such of them as are not already outgrown in the process of evolution. Nothing indicates a family's development out of the tadpole stage, Bess, as do the works of art gradually relegated to the garret. We will not take many of your pictures, I think. I will have mine sent on from Chicago. They are better than yours—though you don't know it yet. And we will take the china, the silver, and the *silicon*. We will not set a backwoods' table. Most country silver looks like pewter."

"What was in that box sent up from down town yesterday?" asked Bess.

"Wall-paper and floor-stain. I thought we might not be able to get the kind I wanted out there. . . . How did I know how much to get? Why, from the plan your father had made of the house. That has helped me out wonderfully. You see, you will have your piano, and the boys their rod and gun. Now, I intend to have fresh

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walls for my share. This is my own private extravagance. I want my pictures to feel at home, and I have a presentiment that they wouldn't on the Dutchman's wall-paper."

They found afterwards that most "extras" were labelled "private extravagances." The children's money was carefully hoarded.

The household effects were assorted, packed, and shipped at last, and the remnant sold for what it would bring. And still the letter did not come.

"Shall we have to wait?" asked Bess, dolorously.

"I think not. It must be all right. When he wrote promising me the school Mr. Burson sent a message to your father about the place being all ready for him, and of course it would be the same for us. It *must* be all right. Still, I wish he had written."

They were farmed out among friends after the goods were gone until the time of departure. It was that very morning—after the tickets were purchased—that Miss Dinwoody received a postal from Mr. Burson.

"There's been a hitch," it read. "Don't start until you hear from me. Will write in a few days."

"Why, we can't wait a few days, or a few hours!" protested Eleanor, indignantly. "The things are at their destination by this time, or will be by the time we are. Why didn't he write the letter *now?*"

"What do you imagine the hitch is?"

"Oh, I suppose he couldn't get a cleaning woman. I

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told him to have one ready. I suppose he thinks I can't do anything but teach, and that you are a helpless city girl."

"Shall you wait?"

"No! We can't at this stage of affairs. Your relative thinks the boys have dreadful appetites. . . . No, she didn't say so, but she looks it."

She sent the superintendent a telegram, saying:

"Can't wait. Goods on the way. Meet us as directed."

But Miss Eleanor Dinwoody thought of that postal and her peremptory answer to it a number of times on the journey from Washington to the Ozarks. She was thinking of it now as she walked up and down the station platform waiting for the appearance of the farmer. To say that her heart was light would be to belie her good sense and outrage the truth. Her bridges were smoking behind her, and in spite of her resolute face she was at this moment poignantly mindful of it. It is small wonder. An untried life was before her and hers, and the unknown has ever its terrors. It might be for good or it might be for ill; but whatever it was, there was no retreat from it now. She was "in for it."

This was the thought that possessed her as she paced the platform with Juddie clinging to her hand, and paused now and then to cast a homesick glance at the familiar-looking furniture stored in the open wareroom. A catch in her breath caused the child to look up.

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"Aunt Nell, are you cold?"

"No, Juddie. Just a little 'shivery,' as you feel when you are seeing things at night."

"But this is daytime. There aren't things to see in the daytime."

"No, nor at night either if one is brave."

"You're always brave, aren't you, Aunt Nell? I'm not *ever* afraid with you."

The clammy fingers on Miss Dinwoody's heart relaxed. A great heartener is the confident faith of another in us.

At this moment Bess appeared around the corner.

"Are you sure Mr. Burson understood that he was to meet us here?" she asked, anxiously.

"I wrote him to meet us at the station at 6 P.M. Of course, he will think we are coming in on that train—which is nearly due—whereas, we have gained about five hours by leaving St. Louis on the nine o'clock train instead of the one at two-thirty, as I wrote him we should. That has given us time to purchase our cook-stove and lay in a supply of provisions. So now everything is in readiness for our early start in the morning."

"Why didn't you tell him to meet us at the hotel?"

"Because I didn't know anything about the hotels—their names or which one to go to." Then, her mind reverting to her stores, "I certainly am relieved to feel that the larder will be plentifully supplied when we reach our destination, 'twelve miles from a lemon.' I hope I have thought of everything. Boys, I feel as if I have been provisioning an army! I give you both fair warning that

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next year you will not live on canned goods as you will have to *this*, but on the fruit of the soil obtained by the sweat of your brows. So, take notice!"

"I'm going to live on squirrels and pattridges," said Tom, looking fondly at his gun.

"*Pat*tridges! I suppose you mean quail. But if you must use the other word, do put in an *r*. You are speaking of partridges?"

"That's what a boy called them—*pat*tridges. He's shot them. He ought to know."

"But evidently he doesn't." Then to Bess in mock despair, "I suppose this is the beginning!"

But Bess was not thinking about anything so uninteresting as the elision of letters.

"Aunt Nell," she said in a low tone, "do you suppose that can be Mr. Burson in that buggy?"

Miss Dinwoody looked in the direction indicated. A young man with a strong, handsome face, clean-shaven, lounged in a new buggy. Apparently he, too, was waiting for some one.

"No! I hope not, certainly!"

"Why? He is very nice-looking."

"Entirely too nice-looking for our purpose. I want to see a rough-looking farmer—a man of experience."

She dismissed the handsome stranger summarily from her mind. But Bess continued to cast hopeful, surreptitious glances in his direction, for when did youth ever give experience the preference over manly beauty?

As the six o'clock train rolled in a road-wagon and a

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pair of strong horses, driven by a man filling all Miss Dinwoody's requirements, drew up at the side of the station.

"Hy're you, Neil?" he sang out to the occupant of the new buggy. "Beat me to it, didn't you?" Then looking all around, "Have you saw any hard-headed old female round here?"

The young man shook his head, his immovable face giving warning, and the farmer turned rather confusedly from fastening his horses to confront Miss Dinwoody. Her face, too, was impassive. If she had heard she made no sign.

"I think this must be Mr. Burson," she said, extending a cordial hand. "I am Miss Dinwoody."

He looked at her curiously. "The young one, I take it."

Eleanor laughed. "No, the old one. This is the young one." Bess and the boys, with their gun and jointed rod, were formally presented. The whole group struck Mr. Burson as being pitifully young.

"You didn't get my letter?" he asked, abruptly.

"Not the second one. I got the one telling me there had been a hitch and not to come until I heard from you again."

"Then, why didn't you wait?" His brusqueness was almost brutal.

"I couldn't. We had gone too far. As I told you in my telegram we were just ready to start and our goods were on the way. Besides, I knew that the hitch meant probably that you couldn't get a woman to clean the house,

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and I wouldn't let a little thing like that stand in the way of carrying out my plans. I can clean the house myself, if necessary."

Her face was flushed now. There was something wonderfully disconcerting in his steadfast gaze. He turned away at last, shaking his head slowly.

"Well, I'll be dad shemmed!" was all he said.

Eleanor Dinwoody felt a sudden prescience of evil. She braced herself as for a shock. Bess came close to her side. The boys looked alternately at her and Mr. Burson. The man in the buggy, who was within hearing, studied his newspaper.

"Naw," said Mr. Burson, grimly, "the hitch warn't about house-cleanin'. I reckon most of that you'll get done down in our part you'll do yourself, anyway. Ther' ain't but four niggers in our county, and the white women is tol'able independent." He shook his head again ominously. "No, marm! the thing you're a-buckin' up ag'in now is some diffrunt to house-cleanin'!"

"What is it?" demanded Eleanor, her face whitening. "Surely the Company——"

"There ain't no Company!" Mr. Burson interrupted. "Hit's busted."

"It's—*what?*"

"Busted. That's what I said."

For a moment the boards of the platform wobbled under Miss Dinwoody's feet. "The Company" was the foundation upon which she had thought to build. With that gone!—with no foundation! Then she felt the won-

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dering eyes of the children upon her and gathered herself together.

"But the superintendent——" she began.

"There ain't no superintendent! I was to have had that job, but when the thing went to pieces it left me high and dry, same as the rest of 'em—a little higher, I reckon, than most." She perceived that the man had his own private causes for soreness.

"When did this happen?" she demanded.

"Well—it's been shaky fur some time. I know that now—though I didn't suspicion it till lately. It was a-boomin' when your brother was out here. And I thought it was all right when I give you the school. But about the time you wrote me you was a-comin' the bottom dropped out of the whole darned thing!"

"And why was I not notified?" demanded Miss Dinwoody, severely.

Mr. Burson looked at her with narrowing eyes, then at Bess and each child in turn with a questioning squint and nod, as much as to say, "Now, what do you think of that?" His only audible observation, however, when he reached the last one was a murmured,

"Well, I'll be dad shemmed!"

Then he turned upon Miss Dinwoody with some warmth.

"Ef you'd 'a' saw fit to wait fur my letter as I told you to, you'd 'a' found yourself notified good and plenty! But you was hell-bent on comin'—and now here you air!"

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To the great surprise of the boys, Eleanor, after a moment's silence, frankly extended her hand to the irate farmer. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Burson. I was so upset that I didn't realize, for the moment, that that was what your letter was about. You have done all you possibly could, and the fault is entirely mine. I should have waited."

"Well, yes—you should. Ther' ain't no kind of doubt about that, but still it was right ornery in me to be a-throwin' it up to you jest at this time. You've got troubles enough right now without me a-pesterin' you."

"I don't blame you one bit. It was awfully exasperating. But——"

"You see, I didn't want to write to you about it till I knowed fur shore. But I thought ef you could jest hold off a little——"

"Of course! But I, having the house-cleaning in my mind—and now"—she looked at Bess and the boys in dismayed perplexity—"what in the world are we going to do?"

Mr. Burson stepped to his wagon, ostensibly to discipline his horses. "She's up ag'in it!" he said in a low tone to the man in the buggy between loud reproaches to the team. "I reckon I'll give her time to git her bearin's."

"Didn't she know anything about the collapse?"

"Not a darned thing! *Stand still there, will you!* Pretty tough, ain't it?"

They conversed in low tones, and when Mr. Burson

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went back to the little group on the platform his manner was kind and respectful. He had just remarked to his companion, "I reckon she's a-gittin' all that's comin' to 'er, 'thout me puttin' in any fu'ther."

"Well, ma'am, now you've had time to talk it over a bit, what are you a-layin' off to do? Go on or back out?"

"I don't know," said Eleanor, helplessly. "I've given up my position in Chicago."

"Couldn't you go back to Washington—where you come from?"

"No. You see, we are uprooted there and there is nothing to go back to. All the children have in the world is in this farm."

"H-m!" breathed Mr. Burson. "Well—you're better off than some at that. You've got a house, and a horse, and a cow—and a calf. She's got a calf now."

"Oh, Aunt Nell, can't I have it? Please!"

"Hush, Juddie," whispered Bess, "don't bother Aunt Nell now."

"Oh, come on and le's go, Aunt Nell!" This from the boys. "Don't le's back out!"

"I don't see but we will have to go on," said Eleanor, at last. "There's nothing else to do. All our furniture is here, and there is no place to take it. Besides"—her courage rising as she confronted the difficulties,—"the house is there and the land is there, and with a cow and all the provisions I have just stocked up with we can't starve before next summer. After that"—with close-set

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lips—"if we four can't make a living out of that farm we ought to starve!"

"Ther' ain't many does that down our way that's got your grit," Farmer Burson assured her with rising admiration. Then noticing Tom's gun, "Why, this fellow can keep you in game."

"Is there any fishing?" asked Hunter, anxiously.

"You bet there's fishing!"

"Load the wagons," said Eleanor. And the die was cast.

In the talk that followed about stowing the family away for the journey, Mr. Burson called out,

"Oh, Neil! Come here."

The young man in the buggy sprang out as if this call was not unexpected. Eleanor had time only to notice that he was broad-shouldered and well-built, apparently about twenty-one or two, and looked the gentleman, when he was introduced.

"This is Mr. Neil Gilmer, Miss Dinwoody. He is your nearest neighbour, and as he happened to be up here a-gittin' him a new buggy, he 'lowed maybe he could help us out by haulin' some of you down."

"As your neighbour I should be very happy to be of service to you," he assured her, with a fleeting glance at Bess, whom Miss Dinwoody presented. They both noted with pleasure his cultured speech, and his smile was so frank and boyish that Eleanor's heart warmed to him.

"I have a seat in my buggy which I should be glad to

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offer one of you ladies." He looked hopefully toward Bess, but Miss Dinwoody, remembering that she was the guardian not only of her nephews but of her fair niece as well, and that this young gentleman was unknown to her, promptly accepted for herself.

"That leaves the girl to the stage-driver," Mr. Burson helped out.

"Oh, that won't do," Eleanor said, hastily. "I thought perhaps she would ride with you."

"My wagon's too rough. The boys can ride with me and Tobe." Then, impatiently, "Oh, let the girl ride in the new buggy. Him and her will want to get acquainted. It's all right! I've knowed Neil sence he was in dresses."

They all laughed at this endorsement and it was so settled.

"Well, Juddie and I will take the stage-driver, then. How long have you known him?"

"Sence the year 1. Now, Neil, you show these ladies up to the *ho*tel, and Tobe and me will git the wagons loaded up to-night. You have the bill of lading, Miss Dinwoody? . . . Yes, ma'am, I'll see that it's done jest about right. Six—sharp—remember!"

She left him with a comfortable feeling of reliance upon his strength. The Company might have collapsed, but the Company's superintendent hadn't, certainly. There was something back of her yet!

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IV

THE STAGE-COACH OF THE OZARKS

TO one who has been facing a crisis demanding action there is a sedative quality about a decision for or against. It is the wavering man, driven by the wind, and tossed, that may not hope to find peace.

Eleanor Dinwoody had lain down to rest fearing a visitation from the spectres of the night. She was not a little surprised on waking to find that her sleep had been profound and dreamless, and that she rose refreshed and stout of heart.

"It is a beautiful day, Bess," she announced from the open window—"a fine day for our start in the Ozarks. Let's take it as a good omen and get all the pleasure out of it we can—to-day and always." (And really Bess's anticipations were not at all gloomy.) "Yes, Juddie, you and I are going in the stage-coach. Won't it be fine to deliver the mail?"

She had accepted the situation. It remained only now to adjust herself to it. And the power of adjustment in a human soul to the exigencies of life is one of the seven wonders of the world.

In the dining-room they were met by Neil Gilmer, who announced that Mr. Burson, his man, and the two boys had already started.

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"We will wait till the hack comes and then start on just ahead of you," he told Eleanor, who appreciated the thoughtfulness of this arrangement.

Unconsciously to herself Eleanor had in her mind the picturesque stage-coach of the West and the long ago, and almost expected to see four horses and hear the horn. She had already spoken for a seat beside the driver, being determined to lose nothing of the journey. But like most pictures of the mind this one proved to be a fancy sketch rather than a photograph. They could hardly restrain their mirth when the coach appeared. It was a three-seated, covered wagonette, the driver's seat reserved for Miss Dinwoody, indeed, but the rest of the vehicle loaded to the muzzle—a towering mass of boxes, bundles, bags, and feather beds apparently,—the whole held in place by ropes.

"Why, Aunt Nell," objected Juddie, "that's the junk-wagon!"

"No, Juddie, that is an Ozark stage-coach. Any room for passengers, driver?"

"Shore! H'ist her up, young feller. There! Got plenty er room, hain't you? and the kid too?"

Miss Dinwoody waved a tragic farewell to her niece, who had retired behind her handkerchief. "If you never see me again, Bess, take care of the boys—and keep the silver bright!"

"Now, step lively, young man, ef you're a-goin' to lead this here percession," admonished the driver. "The United States mails—and females—don't wait fur nothin'

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these days. I take it you are one of them kind, ma'am?"

"I am. Direct from the seat of government."

The man chuckled. He had an abiding sense of humour and was glad to be met on his own ground. His life was monotonous,—forth in the morning, back at night; the same repeated six days in the week and fifty-two weeks in the year. Necessarily his contact with the world was through his passengers. But "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." The stage-driver in his years of service had profited by this kind of attrition, and as freely as he had received he gave, and gave, moreover, with such joyous abandon of rhetoric that it was a pleasure to sit beside him. His cheerful comradeship was exactly the tonic Miss Dinwoody needed on this particular morning.

"What is all this load you are carrying?" she asked when they were well under way.

"U. S. mail, ma'am."

"Mail! These feather beds?"

"Them ain't beds. They're hat-boxes. The bags round 'em is made of old ticks—that's all. Yes, ma'am, sence this here parcels post has come in I carry all the gals' hats—and all their other truck, too, I reckon. Great thing—the parcels post is."

When the first house came in sight Eleanor turned from her inspection of her surroundings to find the driver sorting out bags from a pile that lay at his feet. He took up one of blue denim with a name embroidered on it. It swung by a long string. The man was evi-

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dently preparing for action of some kind, for he held the bag poised.

"What is that?" Eleanor asked, curiously.

"That's a mail poke. Now, you watch."

Just ahead was the house by the roadside and in front of it a post with a notched arm extending from it. Deftly, and without the loss of a second, the driver swung the string of his "poke" safely over the arm and left it dangling there like the body of a criminal from the gallows. "Now, their mail's delivered."

"It is a good-sized bag. Do they ever have mail enough to fill it?"

"Naw," he said, contemptuously. "They give me a poke big enough fur a gal's hat-box, and when it gits back to 'em maybe there's one postcard in the bottom of it—and maybe there hain't! They don't have much mail down here. But they count a heap on what they do git.

"There's a woman down here on the road a piece—she's jest fit to rare and bust 'cause she don't git no mail. I told her yestiddy I'd bring her a letter to-day, shore. Last night my wife says, 'You ought to write to Willie.' I says, 'Willie nothin'! Write to him yo'self. I've got to git up a letter fur that woman. I tell you she's a-fixin' to bust!'"

The road wound on uphill and down,—or more strictly, downhill and up, for their starting point from the railroad was eleven hundred feet above sea level, and their first change a descent. The stage with its

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motley freight, its trembling passengers, and brakes all on, went down, down, down, until it seemed to Eleanor the bottom would never be reached. "Little Piney" had cut a deep gash through the Ozarks here, and the ledges of rock above the stream showed how stubborn the resistance had been.

"How clear this water is!" she commented.

"Yep. You don't find no better water nowheres than in the Ozarks. Ef you ain't satisfied with it, you jes' go down to Oklahomy."

"You have been there?"

"I have that! You see——" He settled himself comfortably for a story, and so did she.

"Me and my wife has a married daughter down there, and a year or so ago my wife got to kinder pinin' after her and the children, and one day she says: 'Jim, how much money you got?' I says, ''Nough to get down to Oklahomy, I reckon, and a little more.' I knowed what she wanted. 'Well,' she says, 'it will be my las' move—but I want to go.' 'All right,' I says, 'the Ozarks is good enough fur me, but you helped make the money and you've got a right to help spend it.'

"Well, we pulled up and went to Oklahomy. Good country. Easier to cultivate, I reckon, than this. But the water!—well, I don't expect you to believe me"—(and she didn't)—"but it's true as I'm tellin' you that stuff was so chuck full of oil that when I'd stoop down to drink outer the creek, I just had to push back grease with both hands to find a place fur my mouth! It's a

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fact! I said first I wouldn't drink it, but you can't hold out at that when you're *livin'* in a place.

"Well, my wife she never said a word. Ef she was homesick she didn't let on. And neither did I. I jes' helt my breath when I drinked the water and helt my tongue afterwards. But when we'd been there about six months she says one day, 'Jim, how much money you got now?' 'Jest about enough to git back to the Ozarks,' I says. 'Will you give me one mo' move?' she says. 'I reckon I'll have to,' says I, tickled to death at the way things was a-goin', but not a-lettin' on that-a-way to her. No, sir!

"So we pulled up ag'in. And when we struck the mountains down here in the Southwest she looked at 'em pretty stiddy, and then she let out a long breath. 'Jim,' she says, 'them hills looks good to me!'

"No, ma'am, we ain't con*tem*platin' another move. This is a good country to live in, and I reckon it's as good as any fur buryin' purposes. Accordin' to my way o' thinkin' they don't any of 'em 'mount to much fur that, but—anyway, this is where it will be."

If the Ozark water was the finest in the world, hardly so much could be said of its post-offices. Places that showed up proudly as towns on the map, which Eleanor had studied until she knew it by heart, dwindled down to wayside cabins with a limited stock of thread and needles, a large supply of chewing tobacco, and a P. O. appendix in the form of a stamp in some odd corner.

And always around it was the waiting group of rustics

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from the hills to whom the coming of the stage was the one break in the deadly monotony of life—women in sunbonnets and check aprons riding horseback; unshaven, stoop-shouldered men, and children of all ages.

Eleanor Dinwoody looked at the phlegmatic faces and wondered how long it would be before she would look like them. Was it environment that made them look so stolid? If not, what was it? And how could one avoid it?

Once on the road a woman stopped them and handed the stage-driver a tin pail. "I wisht you'd leave that over to Jepson's," she said without preliminaries or thanks, and he stowed it away.

"Are you delivery man as well as postman?"

"Yes, I am," he returned, testily, "and it's a-gittin' old, too! Some of these people makes me think of a story Jils Harrison used to tell. That warn't in this county, though.

"Between his house and the county seat, about ten mile away, there lived a woman, a Mrs. Nicholls, that had a sister livin' in town. Jils useter say that no matter what time er day he started for the county seat, nor how secret he kep' it, when he got to the Nicholls place there stood the old lady with a jug of buttermilk for him to take to 'Sister Marthy.' She seemed to scent him a-comin'. Well, the buttermilk would jounce around and jostle out over the wagon-bed and the things in it, and it got pretty old with Jils—same as this does with me.

"One day he had jes' delivered his milk and gone on

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THE STAGE ROAD LAY THROUGH ENDLESS FORESTS.

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to the store across the street, where a lot of fellers was a-layin' fur him.

"'Good-mornin', Jils,' says one of 'em, 'I see you brung yo' jug, as usual.'

"'Yes,' says Jils, sorter disgusted like, 'ef that old woman knowed I was goin' to hell she'd have a jug of buttermilk to send to the devil—or some of her other relatives!'"

The stage road lay through endless forests—oak mainly, with here and there a walnut or a hickory, and in the valleys tall sycamores and spreading elms. But Oak Ridge would have been no misnomer for the country at large, for they were on the mountains most of the way and the oaks were their companions. Occasionally where the trees had been felled vistas opened and showed glimpses of fields and pasture lands beyond, but oftener the young oaks springing up made a thick, impenetrable undergrowth. At one such place, deeply dark and mysterious-looking, Juddie crept closer to Eleanor's side.

"Aunt Nell,"—in an awed voice—"are there any tigers in that jungle?"

"Why, Juddie, dear, that isn't a jungle. It is Africa where they have jungles."

"Where Teddy Roosevelt is?" The child had heard much in Washington of Roosevelt and the big game.

"Where he was. He isn't there any more."

"He isn't!" exclaimed Juddie in great surprise. "Why, who is taking care of the animals?"

The stage-driver threw back his head with a roar.

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"There's several of 'em strivin' to do it, bub."

It was jungle and forest and field by turns—a grateful succession to eyes wearied with brick and mortar and the grime of the city. Sometimes a curve of the road would take them straight from the heart of the wilderness to a hilltop, where they could overlook a peaceful valley with checkered fields of green and gold; pasture lands and grazing cattle; the house that told of human life and its interests; and far in the distance green walls of ever-present forest whose gently undulating skyline gave a hint of other hills and other valleys yet beyond.

Over it all, this day, was the sky that goes best with such a landscape—a blue vault and floating cumulus clouds that cast their shadows on the green fields, moving and shifting and disappearing to make way for others, like the succession of waves on the sea.

The stage-driver stopped at one such place that his passenger might better take it in. He was pleased at her appreciation of his native heath.

As they looked across the valley a gleam of light caught the highest hilltops, running along the skyline and changing the olive to vivid green. It spread swiftly down and down until the whole dark mass was aglow. The girl lifted her eyes to the clouds to look for a cause. When they dropped again to the hills they stood dark and solid as at first, and the searchlight was playing across the meadows. "There are compensations," she told herself, softly. "Even for the solitudes there are compensations. We don't get that in the city."

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It was a long journey Miss Dinwoody took that day, with the forest and the stage-driver for companions, but she did not tire of it, having that love of Nature that is a never-failing resource, and an appreciation of human nature even in the rough. Besides this, the land she was passing through was to be her home; she must become acquainted with it and its methods.

They passed an enclosed wood by the roadside with its trees girdled by the woodman's axe.

"Are they cutting those trees down?"

"Naw, they've jest deaded 'em. They do that much and then they die theyselves."

"But why do they want them to die?"

"They're a-makin' a pasture. They'll put that out to grass and they don't want so much shade. See them goats over hyarnder? They've turnt 'em in here to browse. They'll clear the land of underbresh."

"Why don't they cut the trees down decently, instead of leaving them to die by inches, and then disfigure the landscape with their blackened, unsightly trunks?"

"Cheaper. Hit takes from five to ten dollars fur a man to clear an acre of land, and the goats will do it fur fifty cents—and their board. As to their bein' unsightly —we don't make pastures down here fur people to look at."

Miss Dinwoody continued to view the helpless victims marked for destruction.

"It is murder!" she declared. "Nothing less."

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"I never heared of nobody bein' hung fur it—yit. I don't know what they'll do when the women git to managin' things. Naw," he concluded, contemptuously, "trees ain't no rarity down in the Ozarks. The more of 'em you 'murder' the bigger man you air. I know a tree down here on Spring Creek that the stump looks like one of these here big trees in Californy. The owner sold it fur fifty cents."

"He ought to have been fined or imprisoned!"

"Say!" said the driver, with interest; "won't *you* all be plumb blood-suckers when you git to servin' on juries! I reckon when us men git through payin' our fines we won't hardly have enough change left fur chawin' tobacco!"

"We may interdict the tobacco, too."

He looked puzzled. "Inter—*which?*"

"How is this county on the liquor question?" asked Miss Dinwoody, ignoring his query.

"Dry as fodder. That is, in general. I won't say but what it's a little damp on the aidges where the contagious counties dreen down onto us.—What's that feller a-waitin' fur?" he broke off to say, for Neil Gilmer had reined up by the roadside. Miss Dinwoody looked at once to see if Bess appeared unhappy or discontented with her lot in life, but could not perceive that she did.

"Yep," said the stage-driver, "dinner at Farley's. They ain't no other place. That white house with the blue trimmin's is it." Then to Eleanor, "I leave you there, ma'am. This young feller will load you on to the

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other stage. Yes, ma'am, I turn round now and go back to the old woman, and that driver he does the same."

At Farley's he shook hands with her cordially.

"I'm sorry I can't haul you all the way. I've enjoyed your company."

"It is certainly mutual," said Eleanor. The last word she heard was:

"It's—*which?*"

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V

MR. BURSON IS WON

THE dining-table at Farley's was a long and exceedingly narrow one, with a platter of fried bacon and heaped-up dishes of vegetables ranged down the centre on a plumb line. To add to the appearance of unyielding precision, with these were alternated impartially glass receptacles of honey, jam, molasses, apple-butter, and pale-yellow pickles.

But if the table was prim it was also clean, and a ride of six hours in the mountain air had whetted their appetites. None of the viands went begging, least of all the plate of "Ozark biscuits," as they were introduced,—fat and generous, and slightly lemon-tinged.

Neil and the two ladies sat at one end of the table and exchanged experiences; Mr. Burson and the boys at the other, with the stage-drivers and the other hotel habitués, among whom was not only the sound of noisy feeding but a riot of double negatives, and misplaced preterits and past participles.

When it came time for the start, Miss Dinwoody, who had a consuming desire to talk business, elected to ride with Mr. Burson and gave up her seat on the stage to Tom. He, of course, was nothing loath, as the new driver was young and had already avowed an intimate

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knowledge of squirrels and "pattridges," and a speaking acquaintance with 'possums. From the buggy came no motion for a change of partners.

And so the little overland train started on the last lap of the journey.

There were many things about which Eleanor wanted to talk to the farmer. The stage-driver's picturesque talk had been enjoyed to the full, but through it all had been an undercurrent of wonder as to how her grapes were to be got to market over these roads. The cares of life were beginning to press.

"I want to ask about the school, Mr. Burson. When does it begin?"

"As soon as you are ready. We'll give you time to git settled and rested."

"And how long does it continue?"

"Four months."

"Four months!" There was rank consternation in her voice.

"How long was you figurin' on?"

"A ten-months' term. That's what I have always had."

"You wouldn't hardly expect us to be as fur along as they are in Chicago, would you? No, ma'am, down here from four to eight months is the rule, and ours ain't a very up-and-comin' district. The State allows us a hundred dollars extry for an eight-months' school ef we tax ourselves up to the limit. But we don't often do that. This is sort of in the backwoods like, and they don't

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think as much of schoolin' round here as they do of gittin' shed of taxes. Now, I'd like to have the full eight months myself."

"But four months!" groaned Eleanor, in despair. "I never thought to ask."

"No more'n I did to tell you."

"And that was what I was depending on to take us through the year."

"It's tough! I'll be dad shemmed if it ain't! But you won't starve. You said so at the station."

"I shan't starve—no. But my cow may. I haven't any food for her."

"Feed," corrected the farmer.

"Feed. I don't even know how to use country language. She is so precious to me that I use human terms in speaking of her."

"She'll feed herself fur a while. Maybe something will turn up before winter."

"I have more faith in turning things up myself."

"Same here!" Without intending to do so she had struck a responsive chord. Her stock rose several points with the farmer. This was his hobby.

They rode in silence for half a mile, Eleanor deep in thought. Something must be done to supplement a four-months' term—possibly a private school. But would the people be the kind that would patronize such a school?

"I wish you would tell me something about the families I am likely to have children from, Mr. Burson. Are any of them colonists like ourselves?"

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"A few. And most of 'em jest about as discouraged as you air right now. There's Jacob Honn, the carpenter. He's got five children, all of school age, and he's kickin' like a mule at a four-months' term. But then he's a-kickin' at about everything, 's fur as that goes. I can't blame him. This thing goin' to pieces the way it done is hard on him. He was led to believe that ef he come he would git the buildin' of all the new settlers' houses, and he laid in a little stock of lumber and paint and truck, and there it is—and there it's likely to be. 'Tain't likely there'll be no more settlers a-comin', now the bottom's dropped out. So Honn's business is gone. Course he could farm,—he's a hard-workin' man. But he didn't come fur that. . . . Yes'm, he's got five children."

"Who else is there?"

"Well, there's Schlitz—a cantankerous Dutchman from down about Hermann. He come out here with Erdmann, the man that was on your place. They was a-goin' to do a big business makin' wine. Maybe they would 'a' succeeded. I dunno. They knowed their business. But when Erdmann died that knocked Schlitz out, for he hadn't planted no vineyard, dependin' on the other man."

"Maybe he and I can work the wine business together."

"You'd better go slow on Schlitz," admonished Mr. Burson. "But then"—significantly—"you'll get acquainted with him in school."

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"How many children has he?"

"Four. Good children they are, too, and smart. He's the one that makes the trouble. He wants to run the school."

"I don't think he will run mine. I am not afraid of anybody, Mr. Burson, if you, as school director, will stand back of me."

"I'll do that," he said, emphatically, "whether it's Schlitz's boy or mine. I ain't a man that has had much schoolin', Miss Dinwoody, but I am one what you can depend on."

"Thank you," she said, simply. "I have felt that from the first. And that is what I need. I know how to teach and to manage a school—I don't ask any help there —but I must know that the school directors will sustain me. Are there any Gilmer children?" She was hoping there were.

"No, Neil's father and mother ain't livin'. He makes his home with his uncle, Burton Gilmer, just the other side of your place. They bach up there—Crow's Roost, they call the place."

"Is the old gentleman as friendly as his nephew?"

"Wall, no," replied Mr. Burson, with a short laugh. "The 'old gentleman' ain't what you'd call exactly friendly. I've lived neighbour to him fur twenty year and I don't know nothin' 'bout him now but his name and where he lives, and that he has brung up, with the help of a old nigger woman, one of the nicest boys in our county. That's what Neil is. I've knowed him from the

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ground up. They was livin' at Crow's Roost when I come to this neighbourhood twenty years ago last February. I reckon I had been here three year before ever I seen Burton Gilmer. He kep' some closeter then than he does now, but he ain't no neighbour yit."

"Where did he come here from?"

"That was what I was goin' to tell you about. The first time ever I seen him was over at Swigmore. That was befo' we had a post-office in the neighbourhood and we all had to go to Swigmore for our mail. That's quite a place. Maybe you've heared of it. There's 437 people in Swigmore. I remember because they had it in the paper that there was a gain of thirteen sence the last census—some claimed it was fourteen. Well, I met Burton Gilmer at the post-office, and I says, jest to be friendly, 'You're not a native, I take it, Mr. Gilmer.'

"'No,' he says.

"'St. Louis?'

"'No, sir.'

"'Jeff City, maybe?'

"He let out a sorter growl-like that I taken fur 'no,' and that was every darned thing he did let out! Well, I didn't care a picayune where he come from. I wanted to be sociable. That was all. But when you mention two or three places that a man mout 'a' come from, and he don't open up, why, naturally, you let the subject drap. I don't know any man around here that knows where Burton Gilmer come from, or asks him any questions. He's one of the kind that believes in keepin' to

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himself and lettin' everybody do the same,—'thout no words about it. Well, my notion is that you can't go through the world that way, Miss Dinwoody. We ain't fenced off in separate lots. We are put here all together in one pasture, as you may say, and it don't do to go to bitin' and kickin' at everybody that gits near you. Not that Burton Gilmer does that. That's Schlitz. T'other one jes' moves off. But sooner or later there always comes a time when you need a neighbour—and when you do it's mighty convenient to be on speakin' terms with one."

This was a long speech for Mr. Burson, and Eleanor divined that back of it was some little feeling.

"I'd have been in a bad fix to-day if you had held those views," she said.

"Well, yes, you would." Then, after a pause, "But he's a good, straight man—Burton Gilmer is—and a smart one. Maybe I ought not to 'a' said what I did. But then you won't have nothin' to do with him in the schoolin' line—nor no other, 'tain't likely."

Eleanor supposed not, but felt a fleeting regret that the old gentleman, their nearest neighbour, should be so notably unneighbourly in a place where neighbours were scarce.

"Are these all the children I am likely to have?"

"Oh, *Lord,* no! The woods is full of 'em. There's plenty of children round here ef they come. They are a little onreg'lar. Sometimes they ain't got the shoes, and sometimes they ain't got the will. I don't want to

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discourage you, Miss Dinwoody, but this is sort of a do-less community you're a-gittin' into. The old settlers—the natives, we call 'em—ain't got no ambition, and the new ones is lost heart."

"Then I suppose," said Eleanor, genially, "my work is cut out for me. It is not only to teach arithmetic but instill ambition."

"Well," the farmer said, doubtfully, "I reckon you better go a little slow a-pumpin' ambition into 'em. Gen-'ally all that amounts to is puttin' the notion in their heads—the smartest ones—that they're too good fur the country and ought to go to the city. We've had about as much of that kind of help from the schoolma'ams as the county can stand! Now, about this here Farm Homes Association—I never did keer so special about bringin' a lot of people here that don't know nothin' about farmin'. They're bound to fail unless they've got money or a lot of grit. Gilmer said that from the first."

"Mr. Gilmer! Why, he told me last night he thought it was a good scheme and would work yet."

"Oh, you're talking about Neil. He's young enough to think anything'll succeed. But the 'old gentleman,' now"—he said it with a quiver of his eyelids that Eleanor did not at all understand—"he's got years enough onto him to know that a good many of'm is goin' to fail, and he can most always tell the weak spot, too. I'll say that much fur him ef he ain't no neighbour. Naw," he continued, "we don't keer so much about new people comin' down here—not meanin' you, of course—but we do want

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to keep our own boys and girls and learn 'em that they kin do a heap better right here than they've ever saw done. Ef you've got any dope fur that kind of ambition, git out yo' medicines and go to mixin' up! But ef yourn is the other kind, maybe you'd better bottle it up a while."

Having rather vague ideas about what her own "dope" really was, Eleanor offered nothing further, and the farmer continued.

"There's consid'able gee-hawin' round here, too. They don't pull together. What one wants another is bound not to have. Now, this here meetin'-house question. We have to vote every year whether we will let the schoolhouse be used for anything besides school purposes—church and public meetin's, *et cetery.* The women wanted it for church as well as school and it was a-goin' all right when here come Schlitz a-tellin' 'em how it was a union of church and state, and about their rights as American citizens, and a whole lot of stuff like that. He calls himself a 'a-the-*os*-tic,' or something like that—sort of a infidel like, anyway.

"Well, I seen how it was a-turnin' some of 'em, and I jes' rose up and I says: 'What's the use er havin' a school ef we air a-goin' to shet the young ones off from the very things we are a-preparin' 'em for?' Then I says, 'You men own this land; your fathers owned it before you; some of 'em fit fur it in the war. Air you goin' to let a Dutchman from Hermann come down here and tell you what your rights as American citizens is? Our

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wives is got some rights, I reckon, and they want this school buildin' for a meetin'-house. Give it to 'em! Ef Mr. Schlitz don't want to come let him stay away!'

"Well, it done the business. And my wife she made me a cherry pie fur it. But they turnt it on me—and that's how we come to have a four-months' school. When the question of the school term come up, Schlitz—bein' a renter with children—was fur a eight-months' school and a heavier tax, and Mr. Honn and me was with him. Then what did Sam Hubbins, a old skinflint mossback, do but git up and ask 'em ef they was a-goin' to let any old Dutchman tell them how much they was to tax theyselves. And, sir, they voted a four-months' school!"

He rubbed his chin reflectively. "A man like Burton Gilmer could do a heap er good at our school meetin's, but he won't come. He says he's out of it. But I hold, Miss Dinwoody, that a man ain't got a right to be in a community and not a part of it."

"I suppose not," she said, doubtfully—"a man."

This was the exact position she had intended to take herself. In view of the want of co-operation in the community that Mr. Burson's story indicated it did not seem quite tenable.

"Isn't there any church building here?" she asked.

"No, ma'am."

"Where do they have their Sunday school?"

"They don't have no Sunday school."

"They might have it at the public hall, I should think."

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"There ain't no public hall."

"Why, the Farm Homes literature said——"

"The Farm Homes literature said a lot of things that ain't come to pass yit—*and never will.*"

"But the cannery?"

"My wife's kitchen is all the cannery I've saw."

"And the creamery? Don't tell me there isn't a creamery!" She had counted on sending in milk and bringing home butter.

"Your cow's as good as any, I reckon. I'll lend you our old churn. We've got a new one now."

"But the central farm? Is that a myth, too?"

"Well, I reckon you might call mine the central farm ef you wanted to keep up the lie."

The very ground was sinking under Miss Dinwoody's feet.

"Mr. Burson," she said, bracing herself for the answer, "is there a house on our land?"

"There certainly is—and a good one."

She sank back. "Thank heaven! Will we get there before dark? I want to get my feet on solid ground."

"You'll find it solid enough, I reckon," he said, drily. "But I'm a-goin' to put you up at my house fur the night—half a mile this side. We could git you there before dark, but you won't feel like goin' to farmin' the first night, I reckon. After a good supper and a night's rest, things will look brighter to you, maybe. Marthy's lookin' fur you."

"Oh, Mr. Burson!"—her voice broke then—"you

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are so good! I think I *will* have more courage in the morning."

"Course you will. And you'll come out all right. That boy of yourn is takin' hold right now. He's drove most of the way. I'll learn him how to hitch up in the mornin'."

"Please do. There are so many things they will have to learn that I can't teach them. I feel so helpless about that."

"I'll learn 'em," he said, kindly. "Ef I ain't the superintendent of no colony, I'm a-going to stand back of you and your children till you git on your feet. So there!"

And no classic music or flight of rhetoric ever sounded so sweet in Eleanor Dinwoody's ears.

"I think I will change places with Bess now," she said after a time. "I want you to become acquainted with my niece, Mr. Burson."

The exchange gave her an opportunity to do the same with her niece's companion. She felt a little doubtful whether she had done her full duty as guardian to-day. But Mr. Burson had given Neil Gilmer a fine character, and she was coming to pin her faith to the farmer in all things not pertaining to letters. Her two hours' drive with the young man, now confirmed the favourable impression she had received. Here at least would be one companionable neighbour—and one neighbour with that qualification is worth a score lacking it.

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When they reached the farmer's home Mrs. Burson, motherly and broad, was there to greet them, and when she had welcomed them in her homely fashion and seated them at her bountiful table they were in no mood to look askance at the napery.

In the privacy of their bed-chamber, however, with Juddie asleep on a "pallet," and a two-story bed awaiting themselves, a longing for the flesh-pots of Egypt fell upon Bess.

"Oh, for a bathroom!" she sighed, looking at the granite basin in a chair that was to do duty as a lavatory.

This met with no response and she persisted,

"*Wouldn't* you like to step into a bathtub, Aunt Nell?"

"Yes," said Eleanor, with a deliberation that was distinctly significant, "I *should* like to step into a bathtub. But we can't have everything in this world, Bess, and let me tell you that we are having *right now* what is worth more to us than a bathroom nickel-plated and tiled with onyx! Do you know of any city home, Bess Dinwoody—the place where such luxuries prevail—that would take in and minister to five hungry, houseless, homesick wayfarers? . . . No, I guess you don't! Well, then—bathe in sections in the granite ware, *and be thankful!* But first of all—help me off with this feather bed. I adore the warmth of the Burson welcome, but I don't wish to be smothered in their feathers!"

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"Aunt Nell," Bess whispered, guardedly, when they were ensconced in the transformed bed, "isn't Mr. Burson's grammar simply *awful?*"

"It is startling," admitted Eleanor, "but

> "'Kind hearts are more than coronets,
> And simple faith than Norman blood.'

"In our present straits practical knowledge in a counsellor, and a willingness to impart, are worth tons of syntax. Mr. Gilmer says Mr. Burson is one of the best farmers in the county, and a perfectly reliable man. I *like his grammar!* It is so different from that of the Farm Homes literature!"

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VI

A LODGE IN THE WILDERNESS

ACCORDING to city standards Eleanor Dinwoody rose early the next morning, and, as the farmer had predicted, with a strengthened heart. Food and rest and the oil of consolation had done their work. How swiftly courage ebbs away with the fading light! How steadily it flows back with the coming of the dawn! Surely this old world of ours has known no more beneficent fiat than that the alternation of day and night shall not cease.

She slipped from the bed so as not to awaken Bess, stepped over Juddie, who lay on his pallet in the unconscious grace of babyhood, and throwing one of Mrs. Burson's gorgeous quilts about her sat down by the open window.

The scene she looked upon was a singularly peaceful one. A rolling valley, checkered with fields and meadows and high-walled with wooded hills stretched out before her. A stream ran through it, for while she could not see the water, a fringe of willows and alders defined its course. The sunlight was beginning to play on the distant hills and one by one their tips were lighted up. The girl watching them drew a tense breath.

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"'God's ways are dark, but soon or late
They touch the shining hills of day,'"

she said, softly. "Whittier knew that, and he was a seer."

No dwelling was in sight except one half hidden in the clump of trees on a hillside away across the fields.

"I wonder if that can be our house," she thought. "I think Mr. Burson said we could see it from here."

The road which passed in front of the Burson place lost itself in the woods at the right, circled the little valley, and was not seen again until it appeared close to the house she had observed. There it turned abruptly up the hill and back, disappearing in the forest—a tawny ribbon thrown across the green hill.

"There's a way out," she said, half aloud. "I wonder—I wonder—if there isn't always a way out—if we only knew how to find it. . . . What is it in that green field (if it is a field) next to the house?" She took an opera-glass from her bag. "Why, that is a vineyard! I do believe it is our place. Bess! Bess! wake up and look at the land where our possessions lie!"

"Yes, that's the place," Bess said, rubbing her eyes. "Mr. Gilmer told me last night where to look for it."

"I certainly am glad we will be able to see the Burson light. That will be some company."

They dressed hastily and woke Juddie, all eager now to reach their own.

As they were ready to start after breakfast Mrs. Bur-

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son put into Eleanor's hands a generous loaf of bread. "You won't have time to cook much to-day. I'll start the boys across the fields with the milk. I hope the house will please you."

"Oh, I think it will," said Eleanor, vaguely. "I'm going to make it suit. I only wish I could have got a woman."

Down the road "a right smart piece," as the vernacular hath it, they came to the schoolhouse, which Eleanor viewed with interest, and a little further on to Mr. Honn's place, with its pathetic little unused lumber pile.

"We'll stop for the mail," Mr. Burson said. "Yes, he has the post-office. It was to come to me, but I didn't hardly have time to bother with it, and then I reckon he needs it wuss'n I do."

But not even the post-office had succeeded in pacifying Mr. Honn.

"You've come to the jumpin' off place," he told Eleanor in acknowledgment of their introduction.

"Well, I'm not going to jump off yet! Isn't this view beautiful!"

"Oh, the view is all right," he growled, "but you can't live on views."

"No," was the quick retort, "they don't feed the body but they do the soul." She was thinking, "I will not let myself be dominated by this man's pessimism." But, for all that, she was depressed by it.

They passed the vineyard in time and turned into an

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enclosure studded with oaks. "Thank Heaven, there are trees!" murmured Eleanor. "And such trees!"

"You'd better thank Heaven the Dutchman lived long enough to clear some of them out."

"I do. It is open and beautiful as an English park. And see that magnificent ledge of rocks across from us."

"That's on towards Crow's Roost. It's pretty rough around there."

When they drew up before the door Neil Gilmer was awaiting them.

"Good-morning! good-morning! I hope you both feel rested." He shook hands with them as if they were old friends. And indeed they felt themselves to be. It was good to see his handsome, boyish face. There was a trumpet call to courage in his very voice.

"Well, walk in, Miss Dinwoody, and see how you like the looks of things." It struck Eleanor that they were anxious on this score.

"I will take a look outside first."

What she saw was a neat story-and-a-half house with a broad porch across the front and double windows in each room that commanded the valley view. Above was an expanse of windowlesss roof. The bedrooms had one window each in the gables. Miss Dinwoody shook her head slowly in perplexity. "Why?—*why?*" she said to Bess, "would anybody build in a spot like this, with an outlook that would bring peace to the soul, and then shut it off with shingles? There will have to be dormers in that roof, Bess, if it takes our last dollar." Miss Din-

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woody's last dollar seemed likely to go for a variety of things.

The room they entered was a large square one with a fireplace at one end, carefully shut up. The walls were covered with a dark-green paper, which sported yellow medallions and pink and purple roses. The woodwork was blue and doors were of the same startling hue with maroon panels. It did not take much imagination to see the old gold and red plush furniture that probably graced this "parlour" in its pristine glory. A single door opened into another room,—light and pleasant-looking by contrast, but with white walls that brought out the blue paint even more violently. This also had double windows with the valley view.

Eleanor's first comment was not about the colouring.

"How clean it is!" she said, looking around the rooms. "I hadn't expected this. I thought you said you couldn't hire a woman."

"Didn't."

"Who swept it then?"

"My wife. She come up here while I was gone after you. But she didn't do it fur money, Miss Dinwoody."

"Then, why——"

"I'll tell you why she done it. There's a story about that." They stood around him at attention.

"You see, my wife's mother was one of the people that was sent out of Jackson County by Order No. 11. Maybe you've heared tell of that order." Eleanor nodded. "My wife was just a little child then, but she says she never

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will forgit how they felt when they drove up through the horse-weeds, high as the house nearly, just as night was a-fallin'. That was bad enough, but when they got to the house—well, the soldiers had stabled their horses in it and they slep' that night on beds made down on the floor upstairs where the horses couldn't git. The next mornin' they begun the cleanin' with a hoe.

"Well, after some weeks my wife's mother found that a neighbour woman and her husband was comin' back—they come stragglin' in one by one them days—and she tuk the girl (that's my wife) and the oldest boy and they went over there and got that house all cleaned befo' the people come. Her husband told her she was a fool to do it, but when he'd got through arguin' that-a-way and went out, she called her children together and says to 'em, she says: 'Now, let me tell you something, and don't you *never* forgit it: *The time to help anybody is when they need it!*'

"And my wife says she never *has* forgot it. So, when she found you was a-comin', she says to me, 'Now, that old lady' (we thought you was old then) 'will be powerful homesick when she gits to a dusty, cluttered-up house jest at dark. I reckon I'll clean up a little fur 'er—like Ma did fur her neighbour'—so here you air!"

"And then you said, 'And we will keep them over night and start them off fresh in the morning.'"

"Well, I did!" he said, surprised. "How did you know? Did the old woman tell you?"

"No, I guessed it." Her eyes were dim and she held

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out both hands for his horny grasp. "It was heavenly kindness! Blessings on your wife, and your wife's mother, and your wife's mother's son-in-law!"

"I wish uncle could have heard that little story," Neil said to Bess when the others had gone into the kitchen. "He told me this morning before he started to Chicago that the truest kindness was to let people alone. He thought I was intruding to come over here to help unload."

(When Bess repeated this later to her aunt, Eleanor said, indignantly, "Why, he ought to be called 'Uncle Grouch!'" And he was thereafter so unvaryingly that Juddie supposed it was his name.)

Back to the dining-room the inspecting party came.

"Yes," said Eleanor, contemplating the place and its possibilities, "it is large and light, and when I get a spacious opening cut, and my tan paper on the two rooms, and the fireplace opened, and the blue paint covered up——"

"What's the matter with the paint?" demanded Mr. Burson.

"I shouldn't like to subject my children to the demoralizing influence of this kind of decoration," returned Miss Dinwoody, surveying it critically.

"You'd better not be pomperin' these children too much. Let 'em take things as they find 'em."

"I want them to face cheerfully every hardship of pioneer life—except—maroon panels on blue doors! I'll excuse them from that."

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"I don't see nothin' the matter with 'em. We got blue doors in our settin'-room." Eleanor perceived that the ice was thin.

"There's nothing the matter with them. It is a mere question of taste. As Lincoln said, 'For anybody that likes this kind of thing, it is about the kind of thing he would like.' But you see I don't happen to admire this colour in a door. I don't mind it in the sky. Besides, Mr. Burson, don't you think blue is rather a bad colour for the Dinwoody family to look at constantly just now? There's enough blue in our circumstances to keep us from getting hilarious without having it on the door-frames."

"There may be something in that," admitted the farmer, "though women in the country gen'ally has enough to fill in the time 'thout settin' and lookin' at the woodwork."

("And that," wrote Miss Dinwoody, in writing this conversation to her friend Miss Dixon a few weeks later, "I have found to be strictly true!")

The new cook-stove, bought at the railroad station, was set up, and the boys despatched for wood, which was to be had for the picking up. As he threw down his armful Tom, casting longing eyes at his gun, said with studied nonchalance, "Aunt Nell, I guess there isn't anything more important for me to do just now than to get you some squirrels for dinner."

"You've got another guess comin'," said Mr. Burson, collaring him before Eleanor had found her voice.

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"You're the man of the house now, my boy, and a man's first business is to keep his women folks in wood and water. Now, don't you *never* forgit it! Clean out that woodshed, you and the other one, and then take the mornin' to lay in a supply of wood."

When the astonished youths had shot out of the door he turned to Eleanor. "I beg yo' pardon, ma'am, ef I seem to be takin' yo' business off'n yo' hands. But you told me to learn 'em all I could, and that's the way you have to talk to boys about wood. I 'lowed maybe I'd better show you how. They may as well know at the start that this ain't no picnic they're startin' on."

"You are perfectly right," she said, immensely amused.

"I was just going to take them over to Crow's Roost to sharpen their axe," smiled Neil, "but I hardly dare now."

"Go on! go on! and learn 'em all you can while you're doin' it. There's a heap they don't know!"

Then turning to Eleanor, "I'll leave this load here, now the stove's up, and go over and git the other one. I couldn't spare but one team this mornin'. You'll have a chance to git ready for the furniture 'g'inst I come. I won't be back till after dinner, I reckon. Neil, meet me here then and we'll unload 'em."

As he rode off with the horses Eleanor called after him, "Send Mr. Honn over here, Mr. Burson—right away—and tell him to bring his hammer and saw."

"I reckon that will be joyful news to Jacob," solilo-

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quized the good man as he rode off, " but what in thunder does she want with his saw and hammer?"

When they were all gone Miss Dinwoody turned to her niece:

" Now, Bess, the time is ripe and the water is hot. The day of the working-woman is at hand; and we are *it*. Roll up your sleeves! In the language of the clear-sighted Mr. Burson, 'This ain't no picnic we're a-startin' on!'"

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VII

THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

"NOW, what I want, Mr. Honn, is to have a large opening cut here so these rooms can be thrown together."

"Why, I wouldn't hardly do that," he remonstrated. "You'll need a parlour, and you'll want to be able to shut it off from these children, and close it up dark and good. Then it will be ready any time——"

"For the guests that will not come," she finished, satirically. "I would rather use it for the people that are already here."

"As you like. I'd be glad of the job. But then it don't look like it's the thing you ought to do."

"Perhaps not," she said, mildly, "but it is the thing I am going to do. When can you do it?"

"Next week?"—tentatively.

"That wouldn't suit me at all. I want it done immediately. Didn't you bring over your tools?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then, why can't you do it now?"

"I could, maybe. I 'most always hold off a job one day."

("And I believe," said Eleanor afterwards to Bess, "that that is a masculine trait.") To him she said, "But

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I want the plaster out of the way before I mop. Then I can go at the painting."

"Going to paint, too, are you? What's the matter with this paint?"

"Nothing." There were signs of weariness in Miss Dinwoody's tone. "It is just not to my taste."

"It's a good colour,"—argumentatively. "It hides dirt."

"Yes, I have a suspicion that it is hiding a good deal just now. You keep paints, Mr. Burson tells me. What colours have you?"

"I have blue. You wouldn't want to freshen this up with a darker shade?"

"No! What else have you?"

"Green. I keep green and blue so as to have proper trimmings for white houses. Green would go good with these roses. You might leave the maroon panels. That would make a sort of enlivening combination."

"A trifle too much so, perhaps. I don't want to get too lively. You have white?"

"Oh, yes, but you wouldn't want that for the inside—not with a passel of boys."

She did not discuss it, but passed to the question of prices and quantity.

"Can you hang paper, Mr. Honn?"

"Sure! I can just about take a house from start to finish, I guess."

But when he heard of the tan paper waiting to be unpacked he shook his head lugubriously. "I'll put it on

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for you and glad to do it,"—she had told him it was a cash job—" but you better not start in too brash on house improvements. You don't know what you are up against with the bottom all dropped out of this thing. Burson tells me that you got caught like the rest of us."

"Yes," she said, grimly—this warning was so in line with what her fears and her better judgment were saying privately to her that she was unduly irritated by it—"I am caught like the rest of you. But I *do* know what I am up against—you were wrong there—and I will tell you plainly that I am going to have a decent place to house my family if I have to keep them on bread and milk till the summer vegetables come in. I am not going to come down to sordid surroundings and I am not going to let them!"

"That's all right," he said—" if the cow don't go dry!"

Eleanor retired to the kitchen pantry, where Bess was putting papers on the shelves.

"That man," she said in a low tone, "would rather prove you are wrong and throw cold water on you than to sell goods. It is perfectly exasperating how these men try to manage me about this house!"

"Never mind, Aunt Nell," soothed Bess from her perch, "they won't try it long!"

Eleanor turned upon her. "Bess, what are you planning to put on that top shelf?"

"Canned goods, so they will be out of the way."

"You will find they need to be very much *in* the way, I am afraid, until we get something else to eat. Now,

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this is your department, and I want you to arrange this pantry exactly as you want it—but that is no place for the canned goods."

"Aunt Nell, do you really want me to arrange these things as I wish?"

"I certainly do."

"Well—I want the canned goods on the top shelf."

Eleanor's sense of humuor came to the rescue, as usual.

"I stand rebuked, Bess. There are others besides Mr. Honn. Well, as my grandmother used to say, 'Go on, miss! go on!

"'Too wise you are, too wise you be,
I see you are too wise for me.'"

Neil and the boys came after an early dinner at Crow's Roost. Axe and hoe and spade were all in prime condition, and they had had several lessons that came with special force because their teacher was young.

"Uncle was not there and I wanted them to stay," the young man replied to Eleanor's remonstrance.

"That's all right. Only don't let them do it when he is. Elderly people don't like to be bothered with children."

He laughed—a little unmeaningly, it occurred to Eleanor, but she attributed it to the bubbling over of youthful spirits, of which he seemed to have his share.

The work of settling went merrily on. The stores purchased in town had been put in the back of the wagon

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and were easily accessible, as were the barrels of china ware. Neil and Bess were soon arranging things in the kitchen pantry with the joyous abandon of two children playing house, while the boys, in the virtuous hope that Mr. Burson would hear them, were making their axes ring outside.

To the girl, accustomed as she was in school to everyday intercourse with young men of her own class, this pleasant work in the pantry was remarkable only because it was a unique experience. There was a piquancy about the situation that was vastly enjoyable. That was all.

With the boy it was another thing. For the first time in his twenty-one years of life he was standing side by side on terms of easy and natural intimacy with a young girl of his own kind. It was almost as if a new order of being had suddenly appeared before him. He knew few women of any kind. As a child Aunt Ailsy's kindly face had filled his whole vision. He could distinctly remember the first white woman he ever saw. He had always supposed before that men were white and women black—or he found, when he saw one different from Aunt Ailsy, that this had been his idea. He had not consciously thought anything about it before.

Never for a day had he attended the country schools. They were poor, and his uncle had taught him at home in preference—a fragmentary kind of education he had always felt it to be, but thorough, he knew now, in the essentials. Through the years his uncle had been to him

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not only teacher but companion, friend, and father. He had felt no lack there—but of women he had known naught. There had been no reason why he should know them. Into their isolated life at Crow's Roost no woman, except Aunt Ailsy, had ever entered. He had accepted this without even wonder. It seemed the natural order of things. A woman would have interfered a vast deal with their comfort, he had always supposed. As he thought about it now there came into his mind a vague perception that his uncle had fostered this feeling, in a way, though he could recall little that was definite on this point.

He knew, however, that he had been purposely encouraged to avoid the society of young people of both sexes. This was no cross to him. He had nothing in common with the rustics around him. Had he been of the right material he might have developed into a snob, but being sound of mind and unusually sweet of soul, he took the people he knew for what they were worth and did not trouble his head about the difference between them and himself. They were not of his kind—that was all. Naturally, for the young women of their kind he felt no attraction. They were not of his species.

But this girl! Clearly, if Burton Gilmer desired that his nephew and adopted son should keep free from the entanglements of the opposite sex, he had chosen an inopportune time for his own journey to Chicago. Neil was yielding himself and all his senses to the charm of her sweet personality.

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The very dimples of her rounded arms, bared for work, captivated him; the rings of curling hair about her temples caught and held him in their mesh; and her bubbling laughter was to him like the song in the throat of a bird. Ah, Burton Gilmer! it is easy to thwart Nature for a time, but there comes a day! there comes a day!

When Mr. Burson appeared at last, after much delay, he found the opening made and Jacob Honn putting in the last nails of the casing.

"Well, you certainly are quick on the triggers!" he said.

"Yes, it is ready now for the paint. I have farmed that out to Bess and the boys."

"Mayn't I help, Miss Dinwoody? It's awfully lonely without uncle. I'll bring a brush."

"Oh, yes," cried Bess. "We'll have a bee!"

Mr. Burson was taking a critical look at the rooms.

"I can't say but what it's improved. It helps the din-in'-room lettin' in the sun that-a-way. I reckon that's what mother's been figgerin' on. She wants a door between our dinin'-room and settin'-room. She says it would be handy now the family is so large. But I says, 'What's the use? Nobody ever sets in the settin'-room.'"

"Maybe they would if it were easier to get at."

"Maybe. I dunno. But then ef it was too handy the young ones would be all over it, and then she wouldn't have no settin'-room."

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Eleanor was still untangling this complicated situation when the farmer resumed his business tones.

"Git a move on you, young feller. We've got to unload her before night."

Busy days followed for the Dinwoodys. There was work for all and plenty of it, but in it there were many to share and nobody shirked. It was *their* home in which each had a part and a pride. Tom's book-shelves did credit to his instructors in manual training, as did Bess's muslin curtains to hers, and Hunter's window-boxes filled with ferns, for which he had descended to the depths of the famous " sink hole " near Crow's Roost, gave a touch of the woods that the room needed. The day it was finished they asked Neil over for the house-warming,—which was literally one, for the day had suddenly (and providentially) grown cold and the brush fire they had laid on the hearth had to be lighted, and filled the room with glory. As they stood inspecting it, each one eagerly calling Neil's attention to his or her particular part, it seemed to them all, and most of all to the guest, " the house beautiful."

And so, indeed, in the best sense it was; for simple, tasteful, and unpretentious, it was in keeping with their needs and their circumstances; the very walls bespoke refinement; the pictures, books, and music on the rack, a cultured taste. Even Juddie's contribution, great jars of golden-rod, toned in with the tans and browns of floor and wall, and the black-eyed Susans on the dining-table

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held up their heads and rejoiced in the harmonious setting.

Bess had dressed the table in the finest napery of her mother's store and the china and fresh-burnished silver that Eleanor's wisdom had brought with them to the wilds. There was a heaping dish of "fried chicken," manufactured from the squirrels brought in by the young hunter's gun, and crisp biscuits without a suspicion of lemon tinge. At that table was abundance without profusion and a daintiness of serving that to the young man reared by a black mammy and a bachelor uncle was something rare and fine. In some strange, uncanny way it seemed to him that this was his natural element, and that all these years he had been struggling to find it.

"I understand now," he said to Eleanor, as they went back to the living-room while Bess cleared the table—a picture herself as she flitted back and forth—"I understand now what they mean when they say, 'A man can make a house, but it takes a woman to make a home.' I wonder sometimes what ours would have been if my mother had lived."

"You never knew her?"

"No. She died at my birth, I believe."

"Was she young?"

"I think so. I know almost nothing about her. Somehow, it is a sealed subject with my uncle. He was very fond of her, Aunt Ailsy says, and greatly distressed at her death. She thinks that is the reason he doesn't like to talk of her."

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They were silent for a while, when he said, suddenly, and it seemed to Eleanor a little wistfully, "Miss Dinwoody, I wish you would call me Neil."

"I will. And you may call me Miss Nell instead of Miss Dinwoody." She spoke gaily, but there was a slight tightening of her throat. The motherless boy who had never known a parent's love touched her heart.

When Bess came in with the lights Eleanor called,

"Come, boys, we're going to have a dedication song. Bess, give us 'Home, Sweet Home.' I can't help you, but I'll cuddle Juddie while you sing. Come—Neil!"

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VIII

A YOUTHFUL FINANCIER

THAT prince of humourists and wise men, Oliver Wendell Holmes, gives among the things we all believe:

> "That but for *this* our lives were free,
> And but for *that* our souls were blest,—
> That in some future yet to be,
> Our cares will leave us time to rest."

Eleanor Dinwoody wondered, as the days went by, if hers ever would. It had seemed that when the stress of bereavement, of decision, of packing and moving and settling in their new home was over there would come a lull. But no sooner was the house made habitable and her alert mind relieved of this care than other anxieties held in abeyance for a time began to press. It had been decided since she came to postpone the opening of school a few weeks as the term was to be so short. The last teacher had insisted upon beginning in August that he might have a winter session himself at Springfield. But Eleanor had said, "Begin at the time that would bring the greatest number of children, of course. The school is not for my benefit, but theirs."

"I sorter like the sound of that," Mr. Simms, one of

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the directors, said privately to Mr. Burson, who replied, briefly, "She's all right."

The time of opening settled itself to the satisfaction of all, but not, alas! the length of the term. A four-months' school! How could she support these children for the greater part of a year (it would be all of that before summer vegetables would come) on a four-months' school? How would she get feed for her horse and cow through the winter? . . . And if the vineyard succeeded, could she ever market grapes this far from a railroad?

This last question she put resolutely from her. That would not have to be decided for a year. The others were pressing.

"If only they had voted an eight-months' school!" she thought despairingly. She had gone down to the vineyard to gather grapes for Bess's jam, and to think it out. It was coming to be her place of refuge, for there she could be alone and look off to the everlasting hills. Somehow they quieted her soul.

The vineyard had not come into full bearing yet, but there was part of a crop in spite of its youth and a year's neglect. It was badly in need of cultivation; even with a girl's eye she could perceive that. When she found time, she was thinking, she must get out her brother's books on grape culture and see if fall ploughing would be good. But when would she find time? It was a discouraging morning for Miss Dinwoody. If there were

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only somebody to teach the boys to plough! Perhaps Neil would. A wave of thankfulness came over her that they had Neil Gilmer for a friend. Tom and Hunter had already learned much from him. What a dear boy he was!

Her mind went back to the school term. If only it were four months longer! Then she would be able to buy chickens and eggs and all the rest of the things these people around her must have for sale. They had no market, either. If Miss Dinwoody's subconscious mind had taken a resting spell this morning it is likely Bess might have had green grapes as well as ripe ones to use for her jam, for the picking was automatic; but that faithful servant is always "on the job," so to speak.

As Eleanor pondered, a sudden thought came to her with the force of an inspiration. *Why shouldn't she make it an eight-months' term?* Some of them wanted that. Why couldn't she teach a private school at the end of the four months for those who would send and let them pay her not in money but in produce. She had got back to primitive ways of living—why not to barter? With Eleanor Dinwoody, to think clearly was to act. The boys had taken the horse and wagon and gone down to the river with Neil for a day of fishing. But in her present mood she could not brook delay. She started across fields for Mr. Burson's, her plan outlining itself before her as she went.

Mr. Burson happened to be in his orchard, and thither Miss Dinwoody followed him. When the scheme was

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laid before him he took off his hat and thoughtfully scratched his head.

"That's a new way of payin' fur a school," he said, "but I don't see nothin' ag'in it ef it suits you. What would you want to take your pay in?"

"Anything that man or beast could eat! I find that I have woefully underrated my boys' interior capacity and I want to get something to fill up my storeroom—*anything.*"

"Yes, I know,"—with the sympathy of a fellow-sufferer—"boys of twelve and fourteen is hollow to their toes!"

"I came to you first, Mr. Burson, because if you are not willing to send and think it wouldn't work, I hardly feel that it would be worth while to try it, but I knew you wanted the long term and were willing to tax yourself for it, and——"

"Oh, I'd like to have it. I want these children of mine in school. You can depend on mine a-comin', as fur as that goes."

"It goes a good way. Your children and mine will make a start."

"I don't know as I've got anything you'd want but provender. Yes, I have, too. I've got a few hams more'n I need——"

"And I have quite a few less than I need!"

"How will we know when we're through payin'? And how will you know?"

"I'll set my price per month—a reasonable one. Then

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you may pay the worth of that in produce, at your own price."

"I may cheat you."

"I'll risk it."

"Wa'al, I reckon I'll make you out a list of prices down here, so's nobody else will. Anyway you won't be goin' it quite so blind."

"Oh, if you would!"

They talked over possible patrons. "There's Honn," he suggested. "He ain't got money, but he's got potatoes."

"How much are potatoes worth?"

She had been buying potatoes in Washington, and the price he mentioned seemed ridiculously small.

"I have a scheme about Mr. Honn. How about Mr. Schlitz?"

"You'd better let me see Schlitz. I'll mention it to him. There ain't no hurry. I'll tell him this is powerful select—that 'tain't likely anybody but American children can git in. Then he'll be bound to do it. That's Schlitz!"

She laughed. "Well, there's no hurry. I only wanted to consult you first. Nobody would want to go into it until they knew I could teach, of course."

"I'd bet on that. And ef it's all the same to you I'll be payin' along this fall, so's it won't all come on me at onct. It'll suit me better."

"Mr. Burson! If all the people in the world were like you we wouldn't need any millennium!"

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He looked shamefaced. "Miss Dinwoody, I want to ast you a question. Did you hear what I said to Neil Gilmer that day when I drove up to the depot?"

"About a certain hard-headed old female? Yes. And I knew who she was."

"I've had that on my mind ever sence. Well, I seen you wasn't old. You are hard-headed enough, but not too much so, I reckon, fur yo' own good. And I jes' want to tell you that you got so much horse-sense that sometimes it 'pears like you *ain't* hardly a female!"

"Thank you, Mr. Burson! Thank you! I know that from a man that is the very highest praise."

Before she went he took her in to see the door he had had cut between his dining-room and sitting-room. She admired it to their hearts' content, blue paint and all, and Mrs. Burson, wiping her hands on her apron and beaming, said, "I tell him ef you don't do nothin' else down here you've done that much fer me. I been tryin' to get that door for years."

"Why, what had I to do with it?" asked Eleanor, in astonishment.

"Well, true as I'm tellin' you," put in Mr. Burson, "I never had saw her p'int till that day I seen the sun a-streamin' into your dinin'-room from the other one through that openin'! It lit up mighty pretty, and I says to myself, 'Jacob needs the job; and mother needs the door (or thinks she does); and ef Miss Dinwoody, a city woman, and a young one at that'"—Eleanor bowed pro-

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foundly—" 'don't need a shut-up settin' room, no more do we!' So I got Honn over here and he done the work."

The next morning Eleanor sent for the carpenter.

"Mr. Honn, I want to talk to you about some dormers I am thinking of having."

She took him to the bedrooms and detailed her plan. The dormers were to be here and here,—the dimensions thus and so, making as he would see, a bay-window effect, etc. He listened, nodding his head in approval and saying at last in wonder, "Why, you are a architect!" (of course, with a soft *ch*), and then when she had stipulated for a wide flashing of tin in the valleys, "Why, *dogged* if you ain't a architect!"

(To Bess, Eleanor said afterwards, in relating this, "I am not 'a architect,' but I will get better work because I happened to know that little technical point about dormers!")

The work was planned and his lowest price ascertained. Then the more difficult part of the transaction was reached. "Before deciding upon this I want to talk a moment about something else. I understand from Mr. Burson that you were one who wanted an eight-months' school."

"I was. I haven't come from a place where they have to put up with a four-mouths' school."

"Nor I. I came here expecting to teach a ten-months' term."

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"You did! Well! you are about as knocked out as I am."

"Just about."

"I wonder you don't spend your time kickin' instead of making dormer windows!"

"No use now. But,"—significantly,—"you will hear of my spending some time next year before the school meeting trying to get voters for an eight-months' school. That will be more to the purpose."

"Maybe that's so," he said, doubtfully. "But kickin's easier. I did my best at the meeting."

"I am going to do *my* best before the meeting. If I can help work up a sentiment in this district in favour of a longer school year I shall feel that I am doing good missionary work. Now, I have a plan to propose to you. I sent for you because I knew you were one of the progressive ones in the neighbourhood that favoured a longer term." (This was partly truth and partly saccharine matter. Miss Dinwoody well knew that nobody likes to be held unprogressive—not even a reactionary Congressman.) "I am not satisfied with a four-months' school, either for myself or my boys, and I propose to supplement it by a private school of from two to four months as my patrons desire."

"A pay school?"

"Certainly. I don't contemplate doing missionary work to the extent of teaching a free school."

"You couldn't get anybody." Of course, she expected one bucket of cold water.

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"Mr. Burson is going to send, and he thinks he knows of others that will." She explained her plans so attractively that at last he said, "I would like to send my children, Miss Dinwoody, but I haven't got the money."

"No," she said, "we haven't any of us much money. We are all in the same boat. But I have what you want and you have what I want; now, let's exchange." Then replying to his mystified look, "You want your children to go to school?"

"I do—and I want it bad."

"Well, I want dormers—and I want them badly. I'll teach your children—five of them, aren't there?—if you will make my dormers. What do you say?"

"That would be paying in advance," he objected.

"Schooling is always paid in advance."

"But this would be a good long time in advance."

"Yes, it would. I've thought of that. And you don't really know yet whether I will be the kind of teacher you will want to patronize. Perhaps you'd better take time to think it over. I might wait till spring. But"—with a little sigh—"I do want those dormers this fall—dreadfully!—for the view."

"I never saw anybody think as much of views as you do."

"Well, you see," she laughed, "I haven't much to feed on *but* views. Now you have other things."

"Nothin' much but potatoes. I have enough of them goin' to waste. I raised a lot expecting to sell 'em to

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the people—that didn't come. Now I'm stuck on that, too."

"Why don't you sell them?"

"Too far from market."

"What do you ask for them?"

"What's the use askin' anything? There ain't any sale. They won't pay for digging. It's a good year and everybody has got their own."

"I should think they would be worth something," she said, gently.

"They're not," he snapped, "if I can't sell 'em. I'd take twenty-five cents for them potatoes and glad to get it—but nobody wants any."

"I'll take twenty bushels," she said at a wild guess.

Mr. Honn barely escaped falling off his chair.

"I thought Burson said you was supplied."

"Not with potatoes. I have some other supplies."

When the time of delivery was settled he said, regretfully, "Them potatoes are really worth more than that."

"Probably. But you said you would be glad to sell them at that price."

"Oh, I'll stand by my word. But I didn't know you wanted potatoes."

"No," she said, significantly, "but you would have known if you had thought to ask. I'd have bought them the first day I saw you if I had known you had them to sell. But, if you remember, you were so intent upon convincing me that I had got to the jumping-off place that you forgot your potatoes."

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"You're right," he said; "*dogged* if you ain't! That's one on me!"

"You ought to advertise your goods," she laughed.

"Have you advertised your grapes?" he retorted. "There ain't any around here but yours."

"No,"—a sudden thought struck her—"but I will! I'll advertise them at the post-office and get you to sell them on commission. What do you say?" The cold bath followed.

"You can't sell anything round here. Money's too scarce."

"I shall not try to sell for money. I am going back to barter. I'll exchange the things I have and can't sell for the things they have and can't sell. Why not?"

He considered this but shook his head. "It won't work. What you have to sell this year won't amount to anything."

"If I get one dozen eggs," she retorted doggedly, "that would keep my children one day!"

He could not answer such persistent logic as this, but he held up another bugbear. "And what are you going to do with your grapes when there's a lot of them?"

"I'll cross that bridge when I come to it," she said. "That's a year off." Then they went back to the question of the dormers.

"Well," he said at last, "I'll tell you what I will do. I'll make your dormers and take it out in schoolin' if you will buy the sash. And I'll do it right away. You have given me work, and you've got me work. That

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door over at Burson's ain't much, but as you say about your grapes that you're expectin' to get a dozen eggs out of, it's something. And then maybe I'll get the Gilmer job." She had told him that she had recommended him to Neil, who was now fired with an ambition for a dormer in *his* room. "'Tain't likely that scheme of yours about the grapes will work—but dogged if I don't like your pluck, anyway!"

Before the mail came that afternoon Eleanor sent down to the post-office two baskets of grapes, one for Mrs. Honn and the other for free sampling among the habitués of the place.

With them she sent this notice, in ornate and very distinct hand-print—which Mr. Honn had agreed to post and call attention to:

"GRAPES FOR SALE
AT THE DINWOODY VINEYARD.
All Kinds of Produce Taken in Exchange."

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IX

THE COMING OF WILLIS RAND

THE VINEYARD, Sept. —

MISS MADGE DIXON,
Chicago, Ill.

DEAR MADGE:—Do you observe that the Dinwoody place is christened? The neighbourhood did it—meaning Mr. Honn, who at present *is* the neighbourhood. We had planned to call it "Vineland," but as usual our neighbour pulled back. "It's a vineyard you are trying to work, ain't it?" he asked. "Then, why don't you call it that?"

Sure enough, I thought, why don't we? We are in the land of direct speech now. I know a lady of two hundred pounds or such a matter whose cottage is named "The Peewee's Nest,"—but that is not in the Ozarks. We came to like his name—so "The Vineyard" it is.

I suppose by this time you are in the harness again. I don't envy you even yet; but I shall when pay-day comes! I sent the letter telling all about our coming down here and the collapse to Chautauqua, not knowing when you would leave there. I am glad it reached you and that you now know the worst. It is bad enough, but I try to keep my discouragement to myself. Children take the

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colour of their opinions from the grown-ups so frightfully!

I have been granted a reprieve. School doesn't begin until next Monday. I haven't been able to get into the schoolroom, but Mr. Burson assures me it will be in readiness, and I suppose it will, for we are to have preaching there Sunday night. You can't imagine how glad I shall be to go—I who required so much prodding in Chicago! The truth is, one needs to be deprived of a thing in order to appreciate it. I don't wish to give the impression, however, that this is all religious zeal. I want to find out my present standing with the minister, to be truthful.

Yes, I have met him. We had a delightful visit from him the other day. He is young—about my age, I should think—and his name is Willis Rand. As well as I could make out he is a sort of floating missionary who is establishing preaching posts and covering an immense amount of territory. It seems a forlorn hope to me, but he is as bright and cheery over it as if it were a fat city church he was ministering to. He had heard of us in some way and came around to look us up—as prospective parishioners, I imagine. He got here not long before supper and we asked him to stay.

I knew it would cost us an extra can of salmon, and those cans are becoming more precious to me every day, but he was so agreeable that we could not deny ourselves. By the way, Madge, I call the pantry and its contents your "monument,"—meaning a monument to your good

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sense. It is furnished from the money you saved me last winter by not letting me buy that cloth dress I wanted. You were right, as usual. I didn't need the dress, and I do need the supplies most dreadfully. But, alas! the monument is melting away! Hence, my counting the cost of my hospitality.

However, Mr. Rand was worth fully the can of salmon. We certainly did enjoy the evening. I said to myself, after five minutes' conversation, "Here is a companion!" He is so cheerful and optimistic that I think his coming did us good. And yet he does not seem visionary. His optimism is of the kind that looks at things as they are, and doesn't undertake too much, or expect miracles. It certainly seems as if he had some hidden spring of cheerfulness that I haven't discovered yet. I know well that mine comes from good health and inheritance. (And I have always thought that my sense of humour helped a little.)

I found myself telling him the whole story of the Farm Homes Association and its collapse. "You are not the only ones," he told me. "That caught the Padgetts."

"Who are the Padgetts?" I asked. And he told us about a family living a little way from here—up towards Crow's Roost, in a tent—young people they are, with a little child. The husband, it appears, is fighting tuberculosis, and the wife is dreadfully homesick.

"He is discouraged, too. I wish you would go to see them," he said. "The people around here avoid them,

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they think. That is probably imagination, but it is real to them."

I promised I would, but I don't think I shall. The Dinwoodys are in bad enough plight themselves without taking over a discouraged consumptive family. But I didn't say this to Mr. Rand. I thought then I should go.

Mr. Rand was going on to Mr. Burson's for the night and when he started I asked him to stay with us the next time he came. Don't be shocked, Madge! This is the custom of the country. We are out of range of the chaperon now—or at least we are where it is quite proper for an old maid to be one. And when you come right down to it—*they are right!* What I can't protect myself and Bess from couldn't be done by any young matron whose only claim to eligibility is a *Mrs.* prefixed to her name.

Well,—the next day Bess and I went at the washing, which could no longer be delayed, and oh, Madge! I draw a veil there! I have thought of every possible plan to get help, but there are only four negroes in the county—and have I told you that the county is as large as the State of Rhode Island? It is an actual fact. The coloured sisters were inaccessible and the white ones (who ought to have been flocking around looking for work, for many of them are pitifully poor) were not in evidence. Mrs. Burson tells me the poor whites say when they are asked to work—the women—that "they ain't nobody's white nigger"—and so it goes.

Neither of us had ever done a washing, but when

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you have to do a thing there is nothing for it but to take the bull by the horns. I studied up the *modus operandi* in a book, laid in a plentiful supply of grace—*as I supposed*—and we went at it.

Madge, that day will ever remain a nightmare in my memory! We emerged from it with dripping bodies, broken backs, nerves strained to the breaking point, hands rubbed raw, and faces that threatened every moment to burst from an overplus of blood. What my temper was like by that time I leave you to imagine! Grace had given out before the first clothes went into the boil!

I had just sent Bess upstairs to rest and was finishing up in the kitchen when Juddie appeared with the pleasing announcement that Mr. Rand was on the porch and wanted to see me on a matter of special business. I thought it was probably about a washerwoman for next week (that subject being uppermost in my mind) that he had promised to try to find for me back in the hills, and I couldn't miss that. (One doesn't usually discuss her washerwoman with a young gentleman, but then the circumstances and Willis Rand are both unusual.)

I hurried into a fresh house-gown, gave my hair a hasty dash with the comb, and went out. I might have taken more time, for there sat Bess looking like a peach in a blue muslin. Most of the blood in her face had had time to retire to the extremities, but I was painfully conscious that mine was still on tap in my face.

Mr. Rand soon came down to business. It was not the washerwoman at all! He had been talking to Mr. Bur-

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son about the possibility of organizing a Sunday school, and he had come over to see if I would superintend it. Modest request, wasn't it? And can you imagine a more inauspicious time? Every muscle in my body ached, every nerve was clamouring for rest, and I was so disappointed that I could have cried like a baby.

Wouldn't I consider it?

No! I told him succinctly, I would *not* consider it! He must realize when he thought it over that this was a little too much to ask of unsanctified human nature. I had been trapped into bringing these helpless children here, as I had told him, and it was quite enough for me to have their material welfare on my hands without undertaking the evangelization of the neighbourhood. If a Sunday school were started and the children wanted to go they were at liberty to do so, but as for me I should neither *super*intend nor *at*tend. I was not the keeper of this moral vineyard, as he seemed to suppose, but of one from which I should try to make a living. Oh, I was hateful and sarcastic! I know I was!

I think he was utterly astonished, and I realized myself that I was far from being the urbane hostess of the night before. But you will acknowledge that I did have some provocation. Bess looked simply shocked. She said quickly, though very quietly, "If the school can be organized, Mr. Rand, I shall be more than glad to do what I can for it."

"Thank you," he said, "I hardly think we will organize unless we can find some one willing to superintend it.

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Would you undertake that?" He smiled at her. He knew she couldn't, and he knew I could—if I would.

"I am sorry to seem disobliging," I hastened to say, for by this time I felt very much ashamed of myself, "and I should be glad to see a Sunday school succeed, but with all I have to do I cannot afford to give the time and strength and vital force it would require to put this thing through."

"I am wondering," he said, gently, looking out on the lawn at Tom and Hunter who were raking and cutting weeds, "whether you can afford not to do it."

Then he went to talking to Bess about something else.

It was one of those miserable little seed thoughts that I find it is his habit to let fall, innocent-seeming enough at first, but which grow and grow and grow in your mind until they send out branches like the mustard tree, and the fowls of the air lodge in the shadow of it—*and say things to you!* . . . *I* know there ought to be a Sunday school here. I've known it ever since that day coming down, when I found there was none—with a school population of nearly a hundred. But it is not my business to organize it or superintend it—*and I am not going to do it!* . . . I well know, though, if brother were here there would be one.

Later.

Madge, I am feeling better. It is a good thing I didn't send this letter the other day. I have just had an invitation to go for a horseback ride. . . . From whom?

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Willis Rand! And I must say it was uncommonly "clever" of him (as we say in Missouri when we mean good and accommodating) to take me to anything after the rebuff I gave him about the Sunday school. I really felt conscience-stricken about that after he was gone, for the preacher is a mighty nice young man of my own age, and "sich like" are about as common around here as the bones of the mastodon. By the way, I unconsciously find myself looking for such fossils whenever I take my walks abroad. It seems as if this country and that famed quadruped must be contemporaneous.

I thought the Sunday-school matter all out after Mr. Rand was gone that day and realized that while I was right in refusing I might have been a little more gracious about it. Life would be so much more enjoyable if we didn't bring upon ourselves so many of these gloomy *post-mortems!* I saw that I had simply cut myself off from what might have proved a pleasant friendship.

So, you can imagine how relieved I felt when he came in to-day as cheerful and friendly as if the subject of Sunday school had not been mentioned between us. Things were not looking very roseate to me this morning. I had just made a trip to the pantry and what I saw was disheartening. I count the cans about every other day and the way things are going I figure that they will last till February 23d—no longer. And then what? It is a long road from February 23d to new potatoes. I never have seen anything to approximate the appetite

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of these boys. Mr. Rand told me the other day, when we were alone and I was telling him of my perplexities, that I must think of them always as immortal souls. I may get to that in time, but at present they seem to me mainly cavities to be filled! If in all the discussion of the high cost of living you run upon anything that is filling and cheap—wire me instantly, *at your expense!*

Well, as I said, things were not very roseate this morning, but the minister certainly did penetrate the gloom like a ray of sunlight. He was on his way over to Oak Ridge, and we had him stay to dinner. He seems to be a sort of universal genius, for while Bess and I were busy in the kitchen he sat down at the piano and sang one piece after another until we delayed dinner for the pure joy of hearing him. It is evident he is not a native product. He has a fine tenor which he says has grown almost too strong trying to drown out the nasal quavers of his parishioners. That is the only flippant thing I have heard him say, though he is full of funny stories.

Before Mr. Rand went away he told me he was going over to North Ridge to-morrow to give notice of a service he intended having in our schoolhouse next Sunday, and would I like to go with him? On horseback, of course. I accepted with alacrity. I haven't had an opportunity yet for a horseback ride, nor to get back in the hills. I can borrow a side-saddle from Mrs. Burson. All the women around here ride horseback. I see them going for the mail, sometimes bare-legged girls on men's sad-

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dles. The way they jump down and up would make a city equestrienne turn green with envy.

Mr. Rand thinks we had better take the day for it, so I shall put up a nice little lunch.

I will write you about it all later. This letter must go to-night.

Faithfully,

NELL.

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X

A SHUT-IN OF THE HILLS

THEY started at ten o'clock.

"Are you accustomed to riding?" he asked as he led up her horse.

"I used to ride like an Indian; but I am rather out of practice now."

"You are not afraid?"

"Not a bit. What is that rope?" He was fastening a halter to the horn of her saddle.

"I propose to lead you," he laughed.

"Hardly! I have never been led by any man yet, and I certainly am out of leading strings now!"

He did not untie the rope but simply coiled it and hung it on the saddle-horn.

"All right," he agreed, "but when I call for that rope, you throw it to me and throw it quick!"

It was a glorious day in mid-September with just the slightest tang of autumn in the air, which was full of those mysterious insect sounds that tell us summer is over. The trees were still in their coats of green, for the oaks are slow to take up new fashions, but here and there a sumac flung out its blood-red banner of defiance and the buck-bush along the roadside was taking on a pinkish tinge.

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Eleanor had expected to turn back into the hills by the road she had seen that first morning from Mr. Burson's—that tawny ribbon thrown across the green—but Mr. Rand went on past the turn.

"I am going first to the Padgetts' up beyond you. I doubt if they can come to the service, but I will give them the opportunity. I want you to know them, anyway."

On the way he told her something of them; of the brave fight the man was putting up for life, and his discouragements. He had neither money nor strength. The failure of the Farm Homes Association had been a great blow to him.

"And I don't believe his wife is much of a help to him," he added, doubtfully. "She has lost her grip—if she ever had any."

They found the Padgetts at home, she in the tent, and the young man out with his chickens. This was the phase of farming that he had taken up.

Mr. Rand soon left the young women together, rightly concluding that they would make better headway without a third person. Mrs. Padgett was cursed with a shell of reserve which Eleanor found it difficult to break through, but the child proved an opening wedge.

"She is such a little beauty," Eleanor said. "I can say it yet because she isn't old enough to understand. Just beginning to put words together, you say? She must be so much company for you."

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"Oh, she is. I think I should die of homesickness if it were not for her."

"You have been homesick, too, have you?"

It was the word *too* that pierced the shell.

"Oh, so homesick! Have you?"

"Yes. And discouraged, too. I have had to fight hard since I've been down here. But I believe I am coming off conqueror. I go off by myself when the battle is on, and nobody knows. That's one comfort."

"I can't do that. The worst of it with me is that Arthur knows how I feel. I can't keep it from him."

"You must!" There was the ring of steel in the girl's tone. "That would make it dreadfully hard for him. Those who look to us are so dependent upon our moods. I find that I can't have any now. If a black one comes, I fight it off till night."

"I can't make myself do things that way. I simply cannot fight off this homesickness."

"Don't give up to that feeling. We can make ourselves do anything! We can't control circumstances, but we can control ourselves."

"But I am so lonely! I want my mother! Oh, I want my mother!"

That cry goes to every woman's heart.

Eleanor reached over and took the girl's limp hand in her strong, life-giving clasp.

"My dear! my dear!" she said. And the flood-gates were opened. On the floor the baby viewed it all with

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clouded brow and wondering eyes. "Mamma—c'y," she said, and the little lips puckered.

"Smile at her, Mrs. Padgett. Smile!"

The woman caught the baby up and did her best.

"Pitty mamma!" lisped the child, patting her mother's cheek, her own face radiant.

"You see? Your smile is heaven to that child, and I suspect it is to your sick husband, too."

"Yes," the woman moaned, "that's what makes me feel my own weakness so. I ought to be stronger."

"You certainly ought!" Eleanor would not let her off because of her sympathy. "And you will. I am sure you will now that you know you have one friend who will act as your safety-valve. Come to me whenever you feel that you must tell somebody—or die! I know how you feel. We will help each other."

"Oh, I shall be so glad of a friend! I've had nobody to go to—nobody even to speak to. It seems as if they were afraid to come."

"Maybe they think you don't want to know them."

"I don't really care anything about them. They are all so—so different."

"There may be good in them in spite of that. I thought at first that Mr. Burson was dreadfully—*different*—but now I consider him one of my best friends."

The woman looked incredulous.

"I do. Really. I have got to the point where I have proved that 'a friend in need is a friend indeed.' There is always a grain of truth in those homely old adages."

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"But nobody ever comes here. And they know we are strangers."

"Had you ever heard of me before to-day?"

"Yes. Mr. Honn told my husband about you the day you came. I felt awfully sorry for you."

"You didn't come to see me and tell me so. And I am a later comer than you are."

"That's different. I didn't know you would like to have me come."

"Do they know you would like to have them come?"

"I don't know. And I don't really care now whether they come or not. I am glad you came, though. It does me good to talk to you."

"Even when I scold you?"

"Yes." The girl laughed. "Even when you scold me. I guess I need it."

"I really think you do," said Eleanor, with candour. "And since you like it I am going to give you some more. You must brace up, my dear! It won't do for you to give up this way. You are in a hard place, but you must prove yourself a woman. Your husband needs your help now as he never will again, I hope. You say the climate is doing wonders for him, but you can't throw it all on the climate. You must help. I don't see how anybody can ever throw off tuberculosis in a dispiriting atmosphere at home. Do you? And then, looking at it from the outside as I do, I can see that in spite of your lonely situation you are well off. Your husband is regaining his health and that is exactly the thing you came

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down here for. And with this lovely child, so well and promising——"

"That's one thing that makes me feel so desperately about staying," the woman interrupted. "I can't bear the thought of having her brought up in such a place—so out of the world. I wonder all the time how I will educate her and what she will do for companions when she grows up."

"I read a very helpful article once that said, 'Take short views of life. Don't try to map out your whole life at one sitting, but learn to take one step at a time, and trust for the next to be shown you.' That did me a deal of good. Now, by the time your baby is ready for it I will have an academy down here,—and we have the nucleus of a nice little neighbourhood now,—with yourselves, and ourselves, and Mr. Rand, and Neil Gilmer, and the Bursons. . . . Oh, yes, they are worth having! They are as good as gold. You'll find out the worth of these plain neighbours of ours some day. Now, I see your husband coming and I just want to say that I shall not have time for much visiting, but whenever you need me—for anything—night or day—send me a note by the little Sutton girl across the way from you, and I will come—or send my niece, if I can't leave myself."

The girl's eyes filled. "Oh, Miss Dinwoody, I can't tell you what that is to me. I will try to be brave. I think I can be now."

"Of course, you can—and will. Now, *don't cry!*

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He's coming. Turn your back until you get those tears dried up! . . . How do you do, Mr. Padgett? I am glad to hear you are better. This is a nice climate, isn't it? I feel exhilarated all the time—except occasionally. Mrs. Padgett and I have been exchanging experiences and we're going to be good friends, I am sure of that."

"I am certainly glad," he said, with a look of relief. "Poor little girl, it's hard on her."

"We are establishing a sort of telephonic connection without wires. When I need her she is to leave the baby with you and come, and when she needs me I'll do the same. See?"

"That's what she's needed, Miss Dinwoody—a friend. I certainly thank you for your neighbourliness."

"Well, prove it by coming down for some of my grapes. I have so many more than I can use."

When they had said their good-byes and were on the road again, Mr. Rand turned to her questioningly.

"What did you do to put heart into her? I never saw such a change in anybody."

"I didn't try to put heart into her. It was *backbone*. That's what she needs. But it is pitiful. I didn't dare to tell her how sorry I felt for her."

At Mrs. Sutton's, where they stopped next, she put in a word for the girl.

"I wish you would go to see her, Mrs. Sutton," she said to the motherly-looking woman entertaining them. "She is so lonely and she needs mothering."

"I did 'low to go," that lady replied, "but she holds

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a body off so. She ain't a bit like you. Now, you're just as common as anybody."

Eleanor, being gifted with a sixth sense of delicate perception, divined that this was a compliment and acknowledged it accordingly.

"She doesn't mean to be formal, Mrs. Sutton. It's just her way."

"Maybe so," said Mrs. Sutton, doubtfully, "but I thought she was sort of stuck-up. I never have seen that woman without a collar!—right out here in the country."

The young Suttons were brought in and introduced to their prospective teacher. Mr. Sutton was a director and furnished his full proportion of material to work upon. At the horse-blocks, whither she had hospitably accompanied them, Mrs. Sutton made inquiries of Mr. Rand about the Sunday school. Had he succeeded in getting anybody to take hold of it?

"No," he answered, briefly, "not yet."

"Well, it does seem heathenish," she complained, "not to have a Sunday school for all these young ones that are growin' up not knowin' the difference between a Saturday and a Sunday. I've learnt mine the Fourth Commandment and I make 'em say it every Sunday morning. That and a Saturday night bath is all that separates the Lord's day from the rest. It's awful, Mr. Rand! It's plumb scan'lous that we can't git nobody to run a Sunday school in this neighbourhood! Don't it seem so to you, Miss Dinwoody?"

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Mr. Rand was busying himself about the girth of his saddle, which seemed refractory.

"I don't know that young people care as much about Sunday-school privileges these days as they used to," countered Eleanor. "I am sure city children don't."

"Maybe not in the city, where there's so much going on. But a Sunday school is a great deal to country children. I'm praying all the time, Mr. Rand, that somebody will be raised up to do it."

"So am I," he said without further remark. And they started on their way again.

They had retraced their steps to the turn of the road and started south before either spoke. Eleanor was preoccupied, and the minister whistled softly as they rode along the leafy road. It was the girl that broke the silence.

"I suppose she is right about it, too," she mused aloud, evidently answering her own thoughts.

"You suppose *who* is right about *what?* You speak in riddles."

"Mrs. Sutton—about a Sunday school's being more to country children than to those in the city."

"Oh, yes, doubtless that is true. City children have more in their lives than they do down here, for instance. Still I am not sure but the little Suttons get as much pleasure out of their stick horses and their unlimited riding courses as the little Astors from their bicycles and tricycles and autos. Happiness in a child is more a matter of imagination than paraphernalia." He had veered off

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from the subject of the Sunday school. Then he remarked with more animation:

"See how beautifully this buck-bush growing along the roadside is turning. Isn't that pink tinge pretty?"

"Very," she answered, absently, and he smiled into the depths of the buck-bush.

They had ridden quite a distance before she said, abruptly, "But you must see, Mr. Rand, that I can't possibly do it."

"Do what?"

"Why, take the Sunday school," she said, impatiently.

"Oh! I see. We were talking about buck-bush last, so I didn't get the connection. Now, about this Sunday-school business—don't think anything more about it. It is settled and we will not spoil our ride by discussing it. You have a perfect right to decline doing it. I've given it up—for the present at least. Of course, I haven't for all time, for without a Sunday school to hold these young people my efforts at preaching will be neutralized; but some one may move in some day that will feel an interest in it and——"

"I feel an interest in it."

"Yes, but yours is passive. It takes an active interest to accomplish anything in this world."

"I wish Mrs. Sutton hadn't said what she did," she protested, petulantly. "It upsets one to hear a mother begging for a Sunday school."

'I don't think you will be upset any further," he said, dryly, "for most of them are as indifferent as y—are

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entirely indifferent. Now, here is a long, level stretch just beginning. Let's have a race."

When they drew rein a stone house on the summit of a hill was coming into view.

"That's the Gilmer place."

"Is it?" she said, eagerly. "Hasn't it a beautiful site. Shall you go there?"

He hesitated. "I hardly think so." Then, after a moment of indecision, "Yes, I will, too. I am giving the notices at other places and I will here. Mr. Gilmer won't come, but the boy may."

"Is Mr. Gilmer infirm?"

He laughed. "Not very. But he is not much of a churchgoer, I hear."

When they reached the place an old negro woman came out to meet them.

"No, sir, Marse Burton ain't here," she said, regretfully. "I know he'll be powerful sorry."

Mr. Rand made his announcement of the service and added a cordial invitation to her personally.

"Thanky, sir," she said, curtesying in old-fashioned style, "ef it was daytime I would sho'ly like to go, but I can't git out much at night."

"I have been wondering, Mr. Rand, why you have the service at night. I should think it would be better in the morning, or even in the afternoon."

He smiled. "You don't understand our conditions. I preach at Pine Ridge, fifteen miles east in the morning, and at Sutler's schoolhouse, ten miles this way, in the

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"NO, SIR, MARSE BURTON AIN'T HERE," SHE SAID, REGRETFULLY.

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afternoon. That gives me time to get over here for the evening service."

"Mr. Rand! What must you think of me?"

When they were starting on after some playful message left by Miss Dinwoody for Neil, Aunt Ailsy stopped them.

"Is you the young lady what got all wored out wid a washin'?"

"I certainly am. Why?"

"Mr. Neil said I could ast you did you want anybody to do it for you next week."

"Want anybody? I never desired anything so ardently in all my life! Do you know anybody I can get?"

"Yes'm, I reckon I could do it fer you ef I could please you—and we kin make the time suit."

"I assure you I will be easy to please, Aunt Ailsy. And as to the time, you may come any day and hour that suits you best. And I will pay you whatever you think it should be"—recklessly.

"I ain' studyin' 'bout money. But I got a dress Marse Burton brought me and I can't git nobody to make it. Ef you would do that and take it out in washin'——"

"Nothing would give me more pleasure, Aunt Ailsy." ("I'll do it if it has to be done on Sunday," in an aside to the minister.) "I'll look for you then, Aunt Ailsy. Good-bye! I feel as if I've met an old friend."

"Yes'm, so do I. You jes' like my own white folks, you is!"

"Oh, Mr. Rand," exclaimed Eleanor when they had

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turned their horses' heads. "never fail to walk in the path of duty! You were tempted not to come here! and suppose we had missed this!"

"Is it worth a lunch?" he asked. "I am getting hungry."

They ate with gusto beside a spring he knew about and piloted her to, and never were sandwiches so toothsome as those that came from her basket, and never was water so pure and limpid as that which he brought her in a cup fashioned by his skill from a sycamore leaf; and as they rested under the shade of the giant tree that furnished it they were for the time not in the rock-ribbed Ozarks, but in Arcady; for in the pulses of both throbbed the red blood of youth.

The noonday rest was not for long, for there were miles before them yet. They went into many homes that day—most of them poor and bare, but all teeming with children. Sometimes they went inside and sometimes delivered their announcement of the service at the gate, declining to "light and hitch," for want of time. With every visit Eleanor grew more thoughtful. Most of these children would be in her school. She was glad she had come, was glad to have an opportunity of becoming acquainted with their home life. But the home life was depressing. On what did these people feed their minds? she wondered, noticing the lack of books.

"Now," said Mr. Rand, "there is one more place and then I think we will be through. That is across the ravine and the road is very rough. Can you ride on

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the perpendicular? We go down and then up. This is our first real creek."

There had been a heavy rain a few days before,—what the natives call a "gully-washer,"—and the road had been almost swept from its moorings. They rode Indian file down to the creek, Mr. Rand leading the way. He was on the further side and Eleanor half-way across the narrow stream when her horse planted his fore-feet. No urging availed to stir him. Clearly he was stage-struck.

"Throw me your rope," he ordered, and she obeyed—this lady who would never be led.

"Give him a cut."

She raised her whip, and the horse—stirred by this twofold propulsion—leaped up the bank. When they were safely across and up the gullied hill he coiled the rope and hung it on the saddle-horn.

"This is the place I had in mind when I put that on. Were you frightened?"

"Not much. But I was unprepared."

"Some horses like better to be led across such a place—even when their riders don't!"

"I see the point—and yield it. Where are we going now?"

"To Jepson Mooney's, on this ridge."

They drew rein at last before a log cabin set by rare good taste (or accident) in full view of a vision of natural beauty that made Eleanor Dinwoody hold her breath. The deep ravine they had crossed cut a gash through the

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hills and left on the other side a rocky ledge, whose seamed face was half veiled with ferns and lichens and the scrubby growth of the Ozark bluff.

The cabin had a frame lean-to in the back, and it was sitting idly in the doorway of this addition that they found Mrs. Mooney, surrounded by a small brood. Mr. Rand shook hands cordially with his hostess and presented Eleanor, after which Mrs. Mooney led the way (and the procession) around to the front and up the puncheon steps to the porch whose warped boards of great width creaked and trembled as they walked across them. On a rude shelf was a water-bucket that held a rusty tin dipper and all but the tail-feathers of a rooster poised on the edge, which emerged with much apparent surprise and indignation at the sound of Mrs. Mooney's voice and flapping apron.

There were no chairs on the porch. This evidently was not the gathering place of the family, but two were hastily brought from the house, and the mother and child found lodgment in the doorway. Mr. Rand took the conversation into his own hands with an easy mastery of the situation, and Eleanor was left with opportunity for observations.

The woman, sallow enough to have had a lifelong diet of saleratus, toothless save for a few mournful remnants, and with scanty "sandy" hair screwed up at the back of her head as with a monkey-wrench, looked to be fifty-five at the least, though the baby in her arms suggested that she might be less. One younger hung to her skirts

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and two boys, exact duplicates one of the other, even to their long trousers and ragged waists, settled themselves on the puncheons that formed the steps. The rest occupied various points of vantage afforded by the house-corners and an old blush rose.

But despite her limitations Mrs. Mooney's latch-string was out.

"Have you been to dinner?" she asked. Eleanor thought she could detect symptoms of relief at Mr. Rand's affirmative answer.

"You have beautiful scenery around here," she remarked, thinking to remove the barrier of Mrs. Mooney's self-consciousness in the presence of a stranger.

"Yaas," she agreed indifferently, "some calls it purty —the preacher here does—but I think hit's plumb ugly. 'Tain't nothin' but hills and hollers."

("In this," wrote Miss Dinwoody to her friend Madge Dixon, in retailing this scene, "she is right. '*'Tain't* nothin' but hills and hollers.' But such hills! and such hollows!")

Her visitor's dress apparently interested Mrs. Mooney more than the book of nature. She took in every detail; once, indeed, when the two had stepped to the edge of the porch to look for the river, even taking the material of Eleanor's dress surreptitiously between her thumb and forefinger to assure herself of its texture.

"Where's Jep?" the minister asked.

"Out in the cornfield. And Eczemy she's thar, too. I knowed you'd be askin' 'bout her next."

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"I certainly would," he returned in that hearty way that made everybody feel sure of his friendliness. "How's the schooling coming on?"

"Aw, she's a-gittin' thar,"—she concealed her pride under a show of scorn. "She's in McGuffey's Third now. Her pappy learns her. Between you and him I reckon she's about sp'ilt fer my use. She was plumb tickled to find her name in that thar paper you left her."

"I think I'll hunt them up," he said, rising. "I certainly must see Eczema."

"What did you say your daughter's name was?" asked Eleanor when he was gone. She almost doubted the evidence of her own senses.

"Eczemy. You see, her pap he kin read—some. He seen that name in a newspaper onct' bout the time we was namin' of her, and he 'lowed that was what we'd call her. I think hit's plumb pretty," she challenged. "Hit's oncommon."

"It certainly is," Eleanor agreed, heartily,—"as a name. It seems to me I've seen it though—in the papers."

Mrs. Mooney seemed pleased at this confirmation of the literary quality of the name. "Pap he 'lowed maybe that was why she taken to books more'n the rest—cause her name come out of a paper."

Her embarrassment had worn off and she now took the initiative.

"Air you a widder?" she asked, abruptly, noting Eleanor's black dress; adding before there was time

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for a disclaimer, "Ef you air, I hope you're a widder in the Lord. I've heared tell they's a heap of 'em down beyant the Ozarks that ain't that kind."

("Madge," wrote Miss Dinwoody afterwards to her friend, "I couldn't gainsay it. But it struck me like a blow what the laxity of our divorce laws must mean to a people like this among whom, whatever else may be said of them, the marriage tie is held indissoluble. They enlist for the war down here.")

Mrs. Mooney became more communicative, perhaps because her visitor openly ogled the fat baby and praised his blue eyes.

"Yaas'm," she replied to a very flagrant compliment given for the purpose of limbering up her tongue, "he's right peart, Joab is—fer his age. He's my 'leventh."

"Your eleventh!" exclaimed Miss Dinwoody. "Why, how old are you?"

In her amazement all conventionalities were outraged.

"Thirty-five."

"Thirty-five!" This toothless hag! Only two years older than herself!

"I was married when I was fifteen," the woman went on in her monotonous drawl. "I warn't quite sixteen when the twins was born—the first ones, Lizy and Mizy." Her tongue was unloosed now. She was on the subject of her children,—a topic that seems to oil up all the muscles of the mouth feminine. "I've had two sets. The others is these boys here. Stand up, son, you and Bud, and let the lady look at you. Ain't they jes' like

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two peas in a pod? Yaas'm, twins kinder runs in our family. Lizy's first was twins, and so was Mizy's."

"You don't mean to say that you have grandchildren?"

"Lord, yaas'm, I got five. I told Ras Miller when he come sparkin' Lizy that thar' was twins in the Mooney blood, but he 'lowed it didn't make no difference to him. He wanted Lizy—twins or no twins. The rascal! He nuver let on 'bout thar' bein' triplets in his family! I tell 'em now ef I kin hold 'em down to twins I'll be satisfied. . . . No'm, the gals warn't so very young when they married. They done better than their ma. Lizy was sixteen past, and Mizy she helt off till she was seventeen."

"I thought they were twins."

"They air. But Mizy she waited a right smart while. They wanted to have twin weddin's—and it would 'a' been real becomin' to 'a' had it that-a-way, seein' as they was twins theyselves, but it was jest before the one back of the baby here come and I told Mizy I jes' couldn't be left that-a-way. And then anyway thar' warn't but fo' corners to the house and thar was a bed in every one of 'em then, and it was best fer her and Jim to wait till his house was finished.

"You see, I didn't want to have no bed in the shed kitchen. Thar hain't room fer it, and I don't like it noway. I've heared Granny Dunham tell 'bout how they lived back in the mountains of East Tennessee whar she come from—how they cooked and et and slep' all in one

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room, and never have had as good times sence. But I warn't raised that way. I was raised decent, ef I do say it—and I wasn't goin' to have no beds in the shed kitchen. So they waited till the house was finished. That's it down hyarnder acrost the holler. You can't see the house, but that's her smoke you see risin' now. She's jes' puttin' on her dinner—lazy thing! Mizy's smoke is right smart company fer me. . . . No'm, I don't see ary one of 'em often. It's powerful hard to tote twins round these hills and hollers. But I kin see Mizy's smoke 'most any time a-day, and Lizy's too sometimes by goin' out to the aidge of that bluff hyarnder.

"The gals done right well when they married. Ras Miller he kilt a hawg and a half last hawg-killin', jes' fer him and Lizy and the twins; and then Jim Bowles he 'lowed he warn't gwineter have his twins outfed by nobody, and *he* kilt a hawg and a half. . . . Oh, yaas'm, Ras kilt with his pappy, and so did Jim with his'n."

This in response to Eleanor's gasp of astonishment at this startling problem in fractions.

"You say you have five grandchildren?"

"Yaas'm. The other one is Elviry's. Hers is jes' plain. She's jes' gone home. They was all born in hyarnder." She indicated the quadruple-bedded room behind her by a jerk of the head.

"I don't see how you have stood up under all this!" Eleanor broke out indignantly.

"I certainly have had my gorge of chil'n," the woman said, reflectively, but without emotion. "I've carried

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eleven of my own through summer complaint and teethin' and mumps and whoopin'-cough and measles, and now I'm beginnin' on my gran'chil'n. When we had the measles they was nine of us down at one time in fo' beds. Lizy brung measles up here with her twins on a visit (she taken it from his folks) and the rest they taken it from her. I tell you it kep' me humpin' to git around from one to another givin' of 'em hot teas and tryin' to keep the do' shet so no air wouldn't git to 'em. . . . No'm, we didn't have no doctor. I worried along with 'em till I tuk sick myself. I like to died. When I was at my worst the oldest boy he was jes' gittin' up, and they was a snow on the ground and he'd go out and git snowballs and come in and snowball the rest. Yas'm, I lost one or two of 'em that time. You see I couldn't tend to 'em after I taken down. Lizy she done the best she could, but they was too many fer jest a young thing like her,—and with the twins, too—both hern and mine." She gave a retrospective sigh and shake of the head.

"I tell the preacher it looks like thar oughtn't to be no bad place fer women. They git theirn here."

"What is the name of this—elevation?" asked Eleanor, looking out upon the spot being so patriotically and gloriously populated. Certainly this was not the locality told about in the book where there were nine persons to the square mile! The Mooneys, young and old, would raise the average anywhere.

"You mean this hill? I don't know nothin' but North Ridge. That's South Ridge over hyarnder."

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'In view of what you have been telling me," said Eleanor, firmly, "I think it ought to have a more significant name. I should like to give it one."

"What was you layin' off to call it?" the woman asked with some slight show of interest.

"Mount Roosevelt."

They came in from the field soon, the minister, Jepson Mooney, and Eczema, his literary daughter, who was in McGuffey's Third. After her introduction the girl stood digging her bare toes into the dust in awkward embarrassment. She was a bright-faced girl of fourteen, alert-looking in spite of her unprepossessing attire. Eleanor soon had her talking of her books. Wasn't she coming to school Monday?

The girl shook her head. "I'd like to but it's too fer."

"Isn't there somewhere she could stay near the school from Monday till Friday?" she asked the mother. "It seems too bad for her not to go."

Mrs. Mooney replied in a negative quite decided, for her. There warn't nobody, and then she couldn't spare Eczemy nohow. She had to he'p with these chil'n.

Eczema, whose face had brightened with momentary hope, lapsed into gloom.

"Never mind, Eczemy," said her father, who evidently saw deeper into his daughter's soul than did her mother, and was for some reason more stirred by what he there discerned, "I'll git you down to Sunday school when it's started. Maybe they'll have papers and things there."

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"Will they?" asked the girl, eagerly, turning to Eleanor.

"I don't know. I only know about the day school."

The light faded again.

"Eczemy's most too old to be a-thinkin' of school—at her age," said Mrs. Mooney, judicially. And then with an attempt at archness that made Eleanor furious, "Why, thar's a nice young feller settin' up to Eczemy right now—ef she'd give him any chanst."

"Oh, *ma! hush!*" said the girl, violently, turning a vivid red. And Eleanor shared her vehement disgust.

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XI

THE HEART OF THE OZARKS

THEY talked with both mirth and earnestness of the Mooneys as they rode home—slowly now, their day's work done. They were thoughtful young people, these two, who while having a keen sense of humour and an endless capacity for laughter had yet seen enough of life and its seams to be interested in something more than the froth of conversation. Moreover, the material with which each dealt professionally was the human soul, the human mind,—human life in its entirety as it led into all the ramifications of heredity, environment, opportunity, limitation. It was not a play drama striving to portray life that engrossed them as they rode through the dim forests of this wilderness in which their lives had been cast—it was the real thing!

A young woman once sat with an older friend through a murder trial in which a man's life hung by a thread. For days she occupied a seat close behind the murderer and the wife of the murdered man, who were separated but by an officer of the law stationed there for safety's sake; she heard the bitter arraignment by the prosecutor; followed the testimony; listened breathlessly to the white-faced prisoner's calm recital of how and why he did the deed; looked into the grizzled faces of the jury, many

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of whom sat with tears coursing down their cheeks during the impassioned plea of the lawyer for the defence; waited with every nerve strained for the verdict of acquittal which came in twenty minutes; and sobbed out her sympathy into the ears of a sister of the accused man. Then—for he was a stranger to her—she went to the matinee!

On her return, the older friend asked, "Did you enjoy the play?" "No," she answered. "There was a murder trial in it, and after sitting in the presence of a real tragedy, a make-believe was but a tame thing. I got up and came home."

Truly, to the seeing eye, the hearing ear, the open mind, and the sympathetic heart no play is more engrossing than the drama of life—no famed tragedian more worthy of study than the actors in it.

To Eleanor the story of the Mooneys, for all its comic setting, was tragedy; the fact that they themselves failed to recognize it as such did not make it comedy. The swarming cabin set in the midst of beauty unseen, unrecognized—the apathetic, dragged-out mother—the daughters, undeveloped and unprepared children falling by force of fate into the same hopeless treadmill—the one hopeful scion reaching out for better things that were constantly withdrawn—the inadequate father vaguely striving to meet and nourish aspirations that he did not share—yes, this was tragedy! And it burnt itself into her memory.

"Did you know that Mrs. Mooney was but fifteen when

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she was married?" she asked. This had made a marked impression upon her. So many of her children in school had been fifteen.

"Yes," he said, "I've heard her tell it. Marriage comes early back in the hills, as in all isolated primitive places, I imagine. In the absence of moving-picture shows and the skating-rink they take to it as the only available excitement. Naturally, these early marriages impede progress. When a boy of eighteen takes to wife a girl of fifteen as Jep Mooney did, and they immediately fall to raising a family, he thereby binds himself to the hills, the log cabin (or what stands for it), and the primitive life, and she to the slip-shod housekeeping of her mother. They can't get away from it if they would; and apparently most of them don't care to. They are satisfied with the scanty acres of corn they can get without much effort and the razorbacks roaming the woods at will—the 'hog and hominy' of their ancestors."

He laughed. "I once heard an African missionary say that in the Dark Continent they felt that a start had been made toward Christian civilization when the native realized his need of a hat. Figuratively speaking, we haven't yet realized that lack back in the hills. In the fertile valleys or even the uplands like Limestone Ridge, where you are, it is different. All they need is a few railroads, better methods of farming, better business in the way of disposing of their crops, and a multiplication of churches and schools. Perhaps even more than that do they need

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a revival of interest in the churches and schools that they have."

"I should think so. One that would make them vote at least a six-months' school!"

"We have plenty of good material in this country. It is a native-born population largely. We haven't the race problem of the South nor the immigration problem of the North. These people of the hills are simply belated—that is all. They have fallen behind the procession and it's hard to catch up."

"Well, it is small wonder," she said. "With such isolation as we have seen to-day—and such handicaps—it is not strange there should be lagging feet. And the procession never waits."

"No," he repeated, gravely, "the procession never waits. We wouldn't want to delay that. But we can help forward those who have fallen behind."

"How?"

"I am expecting you to do wonders at it with your school. We don't often have a teacher of your experience and ability in a country district."

She registered an inward vow that the educational plot at least should be faithfully tilled. But she said nothing; this was perilously near the tabooed subject of another enclosure.

Perhaps it was the irritating thought of the Sunday school Mrs. Sutton was begging for that led her to say with some impatience, "It is civilization and what it brings that these people need—not Sunday schools—nor

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even churches, if you will pardon me. They need to be taught how to live, to get something out of this life."

He did not reply to this beyond asking, mildly, "Do you mean Christian civilization, or the civilization we find where Christianity has not penetrated?"

"I mean—just civilization, without any qualifications. The kind that comes in the ordinary course of development. You know what I mean. It seems to me that"—she was in an aggressive mood and his quietness irritated her—"that the influence of Christian teaching is greatly overestimated."

He gave a good-natured laugh.

"You remind me of a cartoon I saw last Christmas. It was a picture of a very up-to-date young girl saying to Santa Claus, who had brought his packful of gifts and was offering them to her, 'I don't believe in you any more, but you may leave the things.'"

"I don't see the resemblance," she said, though her lips twitched. Then she asked, abruptly:

"Mr. Rand, why do you always say *we* in speaking of these people? Is it for the purpose of identifying yourself with them?"

"It is because I belong here."

"You mean you always expect to live here?"

"I mean I always have lived here. I was born in this county."

"You were!" There was no mistaking the amazement of her tone. With it was mingled incredulity.

"I was. Why are you surprised?"

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"Because you are so—so different!"

"From the Mooneys? Well, my heredity and environment were rather unlike theirs, though our habitat chanced to be about the same. That has made a difference in—well, in our speech, perhaps, and—some other things. But the Mooneys are not representative of the whole Ozarks, but of a limited class. And you are not so provincial as to expect to find *all* the people of any section just alike—surely, now! And you from cosmopolitan Chicago!" He turned upon her with a mocking lip.

"That will do for these self-sufficient two by four stay-at-homes who trot around in one little groove all their days and never know that there is anything broader or fuller outside—and never *want* to know, because it would be something 'different.' You know the kind, don't you? that pat themselves and their immediate neighbours on the back and say behind their hands—and sometimes not behind their hands—'We are the people and wisdom shall die with us—and not only wisdom but sound doctrine and correct speech and good breeding and incidentally palatable cooking, as well!' You've seen them? They make me weary!"

"Oh, I've seen them,"—she laughed with delighted comprehension,—"and felt them—and been amused and angry and impotent in consequence. That's the worst of it—*impotent!* Such people are not open to a change of mind on any subject, and nobody needs it more. All the tentacles by which they might reach out for information

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about other people in the great world are drawn neatly within their impervious little shells. They are the kind that make me a hot-headed Southerner in the North and an acrimonious Northerner in the South! But if you have regained your breath while I've had the floor—we both seem to have been talking rather impetuously—tell me something about yourself and how this happens to be your birthplace. I know you haven't just 'growed' here."

"I have. I am a 'native' for generations back. My great-grandfather came to this country from Virginia, via Kentucky, at the time of what Winston Churchill calls the 'Crossing'—that nation-wide movement that led so many families into the wilderness. For years he was clerk of this county. My grandfather, his only living son, was a lawyer, and for many, many years circuit judge. By the death of my father and mother I fell to his care, and he used to trot me around with him over these hills by the time I was able to sit a horse. (Then it was that I learned the value of a halter.) I think he took me with him as often as he did partly because I liked to go and he liked to have me, and partly perhaps to keep me out of mischief. We've had good times,"—his face lighted up with a reminiscent smile,—"grandfather and I, plodding over this country. He was all I had and I was all he had—left. So the bond was close."

"Is he living?"

"No." His face saddened. "I have to make my circuits alone now. But his influence lives! There isn't

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a week that I don't run across it somewhere. That's the immortal part of us anyway. I am constantly meeting people who knew him as an upright judge and a power for righteousness. That is one of my assets. It has availed me sometimes when his money wouldn't have."

"One has a right to be proud of a heritage like that," she said, noting his kindling eye, "and I see you are. Didn't he want you to follow in his footsteps?"

"Yes. It was one of his dreams. And it was rather his pride, I believe, to exhibit me to his 'brothers' as one he was toughening for the pioneer bench. Of course, I was game. Who wouldn't be under that spur? He used to tell me I could truthfully say I had travelled this circuit since I was in knee-pants. But I had no leaning toward his profession. It seemed to me that what this country needed was not so much the law as the gospel."

"Do you mean more churches?" she asked, doubtfully.

"No! More vitality and spirit of service in the churches already here. Many rural communities and small towns are overchurched now. Nothing is gained by multiplying weak, inefficient churches, and much is lost. *Why,* in a little place of five hundred souls, should there be a Northern Methodist, a Southern Methodist, a Baptist, and a Disciple church? Can anybody tell? Why should there be two Presbyterian churches *ever* in a small village? Why, when there is one Presbyterian church there or a Congregational, should the other seek to invade the field? For it is an invasion—nothing less.

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We would hold it so in the foreign field, and we would in the West where interdenominational comity exists—as it should everywhere."

"I know," she replied with quick comprehension, "my mother used to tell of a small town in Missouri where she lived just after the war. It had a Northern Presbyterian church and a Southern Presbyterian church, and then what did the Congregationalists do but organize one of their own with *seven members* (and a few flattering prospects that never materialized) and erect a church?"

"With funds furnished by their Home Mission Board, of course, who felt that they were doing God service in the gift."

"Exactly. Well, of course two of them died a lingering death (as was right), and the other survived in a more or less wheezing condition from the hard pull. But what a wicked waste!"

"Yes," he said, gravely, "it is—just that. And the like is going on all through our land. But it will end some day. With attention so sharply called to conservation as it is at present, people will begin to see sometime that the usefulness and power of the church must be conserved instead of frittered away in ruinous competition. I don't expect impossibilities. I do not look to see the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches coalesce in my time. Neither do I expect 'church unity' among religious bodies which will not even practice 'church comity.' But I do look for a blotting out of a good many unnecessary dividing lines. What do the great

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mass of church people know or care about what led to a Methodist Church North, or a Methodist Church South; to a Northern and Southern Presbyterian church; to 'Primitive' and 'Missionary' Baptists; to a 'Reformed' Episcopal church as against one 'unreformed' and feeling in no serious need of reformation?"

Evidently it was not a question requiring answer, and he went on with a touch of whimsicality, "If they could all be subjected to an examination on the subject with the understanding that one church in each denomination should be formed of those that didn't 'pass' there would be, in my judgment, some large and eminently respectable communions resulting. And then if there could be a providential bolt of lightning for half the rival church buildings on opposite corners the *property* question would be cleared wonderfully—and with it the religious situation."

She laughed.

"You talk like an anarchist instead of a preacher."

"Perhaps I have been rather heated," he said, penitently, "but in all seriousness it makes me sick of soul to see the Christian Church quibbling over dead and gone issues while the Mooneys starve for want of bread!"

"But how would a Sunday school——"

"Now, don't start up the Sunday school again,—*please!* That's a dead and gone issue, too. At least it is —*buried alive.* Here's another stretch of level road. Go to it!"

There is something about a canter on horseback that

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sets even sluggish blood coursing through the veins, and when it is the red blood of health and youth—why, it is enough to banish the megrims. They galloped on and on and on, not talking now, not thinking much, but unconsciously exulting in the physical fact of life and youth and a mad rush through space.

They drew up at last, the girl breathless and laughing, he who had been in the saddle since his childhood smiling but even-breathed.

"How is this for a mountain trail?"

"Oh, fine! But why do you call it a trail?"

"I am quoting from a metropolitan paper which, speaking of the 'round-the-state' trip to be made by an adventurous woman, says that it will be all right as far as West Plains, but that beyond that point to Springfield is a three-days' ride through the Ozarks and since the roads are nothing more than mountain trails she will have to select her own trail and trust to luck to find a stopping-place at night! Well, this stretch we have been racing over is one of the trails! That is about the idea that many people, even in our own State, have of the Ozarks."

"I must confess to being one of them. I am continually surprised to find no mountains here. I expected peaks and cliffs and trails and all the rest. Why is this region represented on the map as a mountainous one?"

"Because it *is* a mountainous region. But, you see, we are on the top of the mountain, and with its thirty thousand square miles it is a little too large for us to step to the edge and look over. It is a case of not being able

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to see the forest for the trees. The mountain is so vast, so far-reaching, so infinitely beyond the range of our vision that it appears to us like an ordinary plain with hills and valleys, forests and fields, such as any lowland might have. It really is very peculiar—this Ozark country of ours. There is nothing like it anywhere else in the land that I know of. Think of an enormous bulk of earth and rock and mineral matter lifted up from fourteen hundred to seventeen hundred feet high and extending over a good part of three States. Good big mountain, isn't it? The general shape of the Ozark region is that of an elliptical dome, and we are on the dome, you see. The axis of this ellipse runs from the Mississippi River one or two counties below St. Louis, southwestward across the State. If you will remember, that is about the direction of the Ozark Mountains as they are represented on the map which you discredit."

"Is the country all like this?"

"No. Around this central portion is a region which is much more rugged, though not so high. The streams in finding their way to their outlets have cut valleys of greater or less depth, many of them deep and narrow, and the whole country is gashed with innumerable ravines. Down in the southwestern part these valleys are not much more than gorges. You ought to float down James Fork of the White River with its never-ending twists and turns to get an idea of what the border of this country is where it drops down to the prairies again. And the caves! Greatest cave region in the world, it is said."

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"Oh, nonsense! Every State says that about something in its borders. I heard a man say once—an intelligent man, too—that the Ozarks were the highest mountains in the world except the Himalayas! He did except them. Can you beat that?"

"I shan't try. But I can beat you to that big tree over yonder. You won't take a dare, eh? Well, then,—ready—set—*go!*" And away they flew, forgetting all the *ologies* and seeing nothing but the goal.

He declined her invitation to supper when they reached The Vineyard, saying that he must press on a little further toward his first place of worship the next day, Pine Ridge. But he would be with them to-morrow evening after he got through at Sutler's schoolhouse, if she would invite him. Then they could all go to church together. And so, good-bye! And he was in the saddle and gone.

Eleanor Dinwoody added a postscript to her letter to Madge Dixon that night as she had promised, telling briefly of her ride. It ended:

"There is an exhilaration about this climate that is one of its greatest charms.—Well, there! I didn't suppose I should ever feel that this country *had* any charms,—but I've said it, and I suppose I must have felt it at the moment. But the truth is, when you get on horseback, and there are long stretches of good road ahead of you, and there is somebody to race with, you forget all about being the head of the family, and tired and discouraged, and

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simply go in for a good time. I suppose Mr. Rand must have his discouraged times, too, but they never seem to come to the surface. Isn't it strange about his giving his life to this people as his grandfather hoped he might— though in an entirely different way? I can see how one reared here and knowing the field,—the people, their habits of thought, and their needs,—would be able to accomplish so much more than a stranger. That is another of his assets, as he says. Well, I certainly have enjoyed the day.

"Faithfully,—NELL."

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XII

A CHURCH IN THE WOODS

THERE was rather more than a passive excitement at The Vineyard the next afternoon. Things were making ready for the coming service, and a church service at a country schoolhouse had for the Dinwoodys, large and small, all the charm of novelty.

"Will the people sit at the desks like school children?" asked Hunter. And Tom suggested the alarming situation, "Suppose some big man should get stuck."

"Aunt Nell," called down Bess, intent on the settling of graver questions, "shall I wear my best white suit?"

"I should," came from the foot of the stairs. "I have on mine. This is our most festive occasion. If not to church, when will you wear it?"

The decision accorded well with the girl's desires. She wanted to wear the dress. Neil Gilmer was coming to take her to church in his new buggy; though, she told herself, that was not why she wanted to wear it. It was only because she would be seeing so many strangers—young people—and naturally wished to appear at her best. She said as much to her aunt when she came down looking like a June rose.

"Yes," said Eleanor, in a perfectly non-committal tone. Since her ride of yesterday she was a trifle less hopeful

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about the strangers they would meet than she had been. Still—it was not worth while to suggest this to Bess. Possibly the homes she had visited were not representative. Mr. Rand had warned her against generalizing from insufficient data. There might be others like Neil, for instance. She herself was eager to see the neighbourhood *en masse*. If there were such a thing as an "amen corner" in a schoolhouse she would certainly occupy it. She desired to look at these people's faces, not at their hats. From that point of vantage she could watch as well as pray, she told herself rather flippantly.

It was in fact a most irreproachably clad company that gathered around the tea-table of the Dinwoodys that evening—Juddie and the two ladies in spotless white and the boys in decorously shined shoes and Sunday suits. Mr. Rand, who felt a trifle travel-stained, and who, moreover, could have written a brochure at least on "Some Schoolhouses I Have Known," looked at them and quaked.

"Didn't you tell me Mr. Burson said the schoolhouse would be in readiness for you to-morrow?" he asked, the uneasiness not quite out of his voice.

"Yes. I wanted to look it over, but he said Mr. Simms, one of the other directors, had the key. But it would be all right, he said. I can get my bearings to-night, I suppose. I always like to look a new schoolroom over before school begins. But Mr. Burson knows, of course."

Mr. Rand took heart. And anyway Miss Dinwoody was a sensible girl. Apparently Bess, looking like an

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angel in white linen, didn't count,—which was more than young Gilmer, coming in at the close of the meal, would have agreed to.

"Have you a lantern?" asked Mr. Rand, as they were were preparing for the start.

"Why, no! What do you want with a lantern? Can't the horses down here see in the dark?"

"Aunt Nell, Mr. Honn's lantern is here," said Tom. "He loaned it to me that night you sent me down there after supper for the mail. I forgot to take it back."

"Get it, Tom," directed Mr. Rand. "And bring some matches. You have singing-books, Miss Dinwoody?"

"Yes, three copies of Gospel Hymns. I thought I would need those in school. We will leave them there. Anything else?"

"We might take along a duster or something of that sort."

"A *duster!* Why, what for?" she queried, amazed.

"Oh, for general results. Our sexton may be taking a vacation. And your white suits are so spotless——"

"Get the duster, Bess. This certainly is a land of surprises. Would you like to take a flat-iron or anything of that kind? or a carpet-sweeper?"

"No. Not a *carpet*-sweeper. I think we are ready for the procession to start. Yes, Hunter, you may ride my horse, if you wish. I'll drive."

They passed the Honns on the way, walking along the roadside, and saw others coming across the fields afoot. "We are none too early," announced Mr. Rand. "I have

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the key. . . . Yes, I stopped at Mr. Simms' for it. I have sometimes found myself locked out,—and the congregation with me. By mistake, of course."

The little procession, with Hunter as outrider, drew up at last in front of the schoolhouse. The place had a natural beauty of its own which could not be discounted, for nothing can mar and nothing can surpass the stately grandeur of the oaks, and the schoolhouse was ensconced in a grove of them.

A love of trees was one of Eleanor Dinwoody's passions. She had come to this primitive sanctuary in no very reverent mood,—led more by the lack of something vital to do, a desire to inspect the neighbourhood assembled, and a lurking love of fun, than a spirit of worship. Then, too, the curiosity to see Mr. Rand in a new rôle had not failed to make itself felt as a motive force.

At the threshold she paused to survey these new surroundings of hers, and let the others go in without her. Evening had fallen, but in the west the afterglow in a dying burst was still lighting the sky with its supernal tints and painting a bank of stratus clouds with carmines and chromes. Even among the shadowy old oaks in whose midst she stood, a faint translucent light still shone.

" How easy to understand," she said, softly, to herself, " why the ancients should have worshipped the sun-god—bowing the knee in awe and fear when he passed from their sight, and welcoming him with oblations when he appeared again. Oh, I can understand that! To them

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he was the source of all good—the symbol of all power. What more is our God to us?"

Her gaze fell from the heavens, paling now, to the giant oak under whose shadow she stood. Beyond her its companions stood rank upon rank, file upon file—a mighty host reaching back to the interminable forest.

"How magnificent they are! I believe there is Druid blood in my veins, as well as that of the fire-worshipper.

"'The groves were God's first temples. Ere man learned
To hew the shaft and lay the architrave,
And spread the roof above them—ere he framed
The lofty vault, to gather and roll back
The sound of anthems; in the darkling wood,
Amid the cool and silence he knelt down,
And offered to the Mightiest solemn thanks
And supplication.'"

Looking into the "darkling wood," it was in a sort of rhapsody that she repeated the lines. The spell of the sky and the woods was upon her. A spirit of reverence was diffusing itself throughout her whole being, even as the colour glow had spread over the heavens. She felt herself borne upward on the wings of the old poet's fancy.

But the peace of the moment was marred, if not dissipated, by the sight of the appearing Mr. Honn and a straggling line of smaller Honns in the rear. Within, she could hear the sound of moving feet and windows thrown hastily open. She turned to go in, not feeling equal just then to meeting her pessimistic neighbour with his scorn of Nature.

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On the threshold she stopped, brought down from her flight with a sureness of aim that left her winged and fluttering, so to speak.

The schoolroom upon which she looked was large and in a way hopeful with its many windows, which insured light at least for this modern Parsee. But it was, alas! in the exact condition in which it had been left by the cyclonic house-cleaning of an annual "last day." That event had been during the January thaw,—abundant traces of which were in evidence. The unwashed, unswept floor was littered with discarded book-covers and scraps of paper; the desks stood heavy with the "bloom of time." Now, the "bloom of time" as a figure of speech has its attractions, but as an actuality it is not desirable. From the cobwebbed windows nearest her, whose sash had resisted all efforts, she saw as through a glass darkly the stately oaks, hoary with age, that had but a moment ago caught her up into the seventh heaven. Why, was it she, Eleanor Dinwoody, that had but now been babbling of templed groves? . . . Surely not!

At the further end of the room she perceived, somewhat to her surprise, a cabinet organ. Around this Neil Gilmer—the boys rendering joyous assistance—was arranging a few chairs and scattering (under a man's delusion that he was removing) more "bloom," as he brandished the providential duster. He had seen it in Bess's hands and quietly assumed it himself, feeling it to be a species of profanation that anything should be allowed to mar her whiteness.

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Despoiled thus of her woman's insignia, the girl had turned to the matter of illumination and was at this moment handing him the lighted lantern to be placed on the top of the cabinet organ. Mr. Rand, at the table, was wrestling with the wick of an unhealthy-looking kerosene lamp which worked (with some persuasion from a hair-pin contributed by Bess) at an angle of forty-five degrees, and called violent attention to a much-smoked chimney. As this gave forth but a feeble gleam the minister turned his attention to the side-lights, four in number, and Miss Dinwoody, from the back, followed his efforts with anxious attention. It appeared upon examination that two of these were bereft of chimneys, another deficient in oil, and the fourth (which had both and was eagerly pounced upon) was found to be wickless. If all the appurtenances of the four could have been assembled and their issues pooled it is probable that one serviceable light might have emerged, but there was no time for that, for the congregation was now pouring in.

By this time Eleanor had gone forward to a seat near her niece beside the organ, and thus commanded a view of the incoming worshippers. Willis Rand was still an active committee on lights. A large central lamp hanging from the ceiling had been found to be in working order, though with a somewhat obscured chimney, and several men were giving directions to one another about how to reach it. A tall brother on a desk solved the question, and in the sudden lightening of the gloom that ensued the familiar form of Mr. Burson, comfortably

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divesting himself of his coat, appeared on the side of the room dedicated to the brethren. Mrs. Burson had been left at the door to fend for herself in the matter of a seat, and was at this moment dusting a desk with the cloth borrowed from Neil. The line of demarcation between the sexes was strictly drawn, even to the youngsters who were there in considerable numbers.

But Miss Dinwoody was outraging the conventionalities of Limestone Ridge by repairing without delay or the slightest embarrassment to the men's side. There was fire in her eye.

"Mr. Burson," she began, without preamble, when she had seated herself across the aisle from him, "this house is not ready for the opening of school! It—it's frightful!"

Mr. Burson cast a surprised glance about him.

"Well, it don't look jest tiptop, that's a fact. I reckon it ain't been swep' out sence the school meetin'."

"Several school meetings, I should say. When will it be cleaned?"

"Oh, I reckon some of the chil'n will sweep it out fer you in the mornin' after they git here. There's Mr. Sutton now." He gave a signal of distress to another director who had just come in, and introduced Eleanor. It being a warm night, Mr. Sutton had taken the precaution to leave *his* coat at home, and appeared in his best suspenders. "We jest been talkin' 'bout the school'ouse. The floor don't quite please Miss Dinwoody, but I tell her I reckon some of the young ones will sweep out

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fer her to-morrow mornin' ef she'll ask 'em right pretty."

"Sure," said Mr. Sutton, encouragingly.

"I certainly shall not ask them." Miss Dinwoody was in no mood for pleasantries. "I am ready to begin school when the building is ready—not before. I should like to have an announcement made to-night of when that will be. Why, Mr. Burson," she went on with growing indignation, "if you were going to do a job of threshing would you get all your hands together before you saw that your machine was in working order? I think not. If you are the manager I take you for, you would have it in readiness for the time. Well,—this schoolhouse is my machine,—and it is not ready for use. My threshers will have to stand around and wait until it *is* ready. You will not be paying them—but," she added significantly—"you will be paying me."

She resumed her seat in the choir, and the astonished and perturbed directors resumed deliberations, now made imperative. The blame they unanimously laid upon the third and absent director, but the present responsibility was theirs. There was no misunderstanding Miss Dinwoody's frame of mind nor her intentions. Never had they been so talked to by a woman teacher.

"She's heady," apologized Mr. Burson, rubbing his chin. "I don't know, though, but what she's got the right of it." His unsealed eyes sought the floor. "This ain't no fit place fer a woman like her—used to city doin's. Simms oughtn't to 'a' neglected things this way!"

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"That's true. He ought not. But then"—Mr. Sutton's outraged sense of the eternal fitness of things shot up like a repressed geyser—"hit ain't seemly, Mr. Burson, for any female to be demandin' things that-a-way! A female, in my jedgment, should be mild and yieldin' like. That's the way the Lord intended 'em to be. And them's the kind that gits what they want from the men! Yes, sir! Everybody'll tell you so. Say,"—he broke off to suggest, "there's Mrs. Tolles. Don't she work out sometimes? Maybe we can get her to clean up the school'ouse without waitin' fer Simms. Maybe it would be jest as well to humour this here city woman, seein' as she is in sech a swivit."

And Mrs. Tolles was called into conference.

By this time the hour for the service had arrived. But still the people came,—on foot, on horseback, and a few in conveyances of differing kinds. Many of them remained outside in sociable converse waiting for the singing to begin, but many also found seats inside,—among them Jepson Mooney and his daughter Eczema. The girl, who had a voice, was sent forward by Mr. Rand (down at the door shaking hands with all) and Eleanor gave her a cordial greeting, much to Eczema's outward embarrassment and inward delight. She took in every detail of the white suits, wondering in her unsophisticated soul if their cloth had given out in the cutting. Too bad! And they such lovely ladies!

When the first hymn was announced, Bess by agree-

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ment took her place at the organ, supported by Eleanor on the left and on the right by Neil, holding the lantern aloft like a male statue of Liberty Enlightening the World. Near them was a group of embryo singers corralled by Mr. Rand—girls, of course; boys are not to be snared thus,—certainly not in the country.

The simple prelude was well under way when without warning a discordant treble wail broke forth, insistent and continuous. A reed had stuck! And a reed that goes astray in a cabinet organ is a relentless thing. Poor Bess, unused to this variety, pumped hard and the diabolical thing responded with a yet louder, more piercing cry.

"Hold it up!" came a stage whisper from Eleanor to Neil.

Conceiving that this was from a determination to find the cause of the trouble and magnifying his office as light-bearer, the young man hurriedly elevated his lantern and looked inquiringly at her.

"No. The key! hold it up!" Before he could know what to do she had reached over the agitated and trembling hands of the performer and caught at the offending ivory. Neil grasped the thought and the key simultaneously and the wail ceased. It seemed for the moment that so long as he could hold the position the day was saved, though it required some skill for Bess to play around a fixed point, and by now she was not at her best. No sooner, however, was harmony restored in the upper register than an ominous boom was heard from the lower

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regions. It seemed to come from the bowels of the earth. In avoiding Scylla she had been broken upon Charybdis! But Eleanor's quick eye had discovered the protesting reed and released it. The prelude was finished thus—a six hand performance—and Miss Dinwoody said peremptorily to the now wholly confused and helpless organist, "When we begin to sing, *stop!* This is an *infernal machine!*"

The music thereafter—and there was much of it—was purely vocal, but Willis Rand was accustomed to exigencies of all kinds and his resonant voice filled the breach.

That service, so inauspiciously begun, was one that Eleanor Dinwoody never forgot,—not because of its *outré* setting; nor of their ignominious defeat at the organ—*that,* by a fortunate trait of human nature which causes us to forget the untoward and remember the humorous, would be by to-morrow but a thing to laugh over and to fill a page for Madge Dixon's delectation. Not even was it memorable because of the sermon, which, straightforward and forcible though it was and adapted to the needs and comprehension of the people, was remarkable for nothing else.

No, that which made of this night a milestone in her memory, forever fixed, was a subtle, inexplicable change wrought in herself, of which she was but dimly conscious at the time, though she felt the impulse arising from it.

She had come to this backwoods place of worship, as

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has been intimated, expecting much to interest and more to amuse. Possessed of the coveted " amen corner " commanding a view of the whole waiting congregation and yet half hidden herself by the amateur choir so that she was not unpleasantly prominent, she settled back to a keen enjoyment of the hour. What a good time she would have writing this up for the girls in Chicago—Madge would read it to them, of course. She could well imagine the shrieks of laughter that would follow her account of these coatless men and hatless women, these children that ought to be in bed and mothers with nursing babies. There was one there—a pale young thing that didn't look to be more than sixteen and the youth beside her but a boy! And that baby!—well, it couldn't be a month old. And the awkward way he held it!—as if he were afraid it would break, when of course it was only a spineless lump of putty as yet. She was glad *they* had the grace to sit together, anyway. They were laying it on the desk in front of them now—as if it were a doll—and fussing with the comforter in which it was wrapped. Why, look at the boy! He actually looked as if he was proud of it. Was that what they had brought it to church for?—to exhibit it? Or was it that she had stayed at home till she was obliged to satisfy the social instinct or die? How funny to bring a month-old infant to church!

The sermon was under way now and it made a good monotonous accompaniment to the duets and trios openly indulged in by the young people in the back. Mr. Rand reproved them once or twice, but she could not see that it

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made more than a temporary lull. This was evidently a social occasion. A young fellow in the middle of the house stretched himself sleepily just here and lounged out of the door, two or three half-grown boys following him. She could hear them outside, laughing and talking.

She wondered how it was possible for Willis Rand to talk in the face of such marked inattention. Some of the men nodded, first on one side—lower, lower, and yet more low—while Eleanor waited with breathless interest for that final event that happens to us all when equilibrium is lost and regained in one startled moment, to be lost and regained impartially on the other side until a determined brace brings us upright with a foolish look and a challenging expression that demands, "Who said so?" Some of them laid their heads down calmly on the desks as though they were their pillows at home and slept openly—of mouth and mien. Oh, it was funny! A good story could be made of this.

She felt herself in the detached position of an outsider viewing a scene in which she has no interest save that of a spectator. With the intellectual life of this community she of course was, as the prospective instructor of its children, intimately concerned. Beyond that her responsibility did not go. Its social side, she could see with one glance into the faces before her, was hopeless. Its spiritual life if it had any—well,—certainly that was not laid upon her. She would do her own limited part faithfully, as indeed she hoped she had always done it, but she would

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be careful to make no mistakes about jurisdiction; and she would let no one else make any. This field was hers; that, another's. She would see to it that the boundaries were well defined and held inviolable. This with a slight tightening of the lips.

But strange to say, as she looked at the dull faces before her they became less and less amusing to her and momently more pathetic. How barren their lives must be! She had had a glimpse of this yesterday when from house to house she had looked vainly for books, papers, magazines, for pictures, flowers,—anything that would feed the inner life or give evidence of a healthy craving for beauty. And most of all had she marvelled at their deafness to the call of Nature,—their blindness to what was spread out before them. Again and again yesterday she had tried to discover the faintest spark of appreciation—of perception even that it was there. Mrs. Mooney's "'Tain't nothin' but hills and hollers" voiced the general sentiment apparently. She had tried them from different angles. Did they know the name of these wild flowers she had gathered? They were new to her. "Naw," would be the indifferent reply, "them ain't nothin' but weeds." . . . Were there many birds around here? Not as they'd ever seen. They was a right smart er whippoorwills. And ther' was pattridges. And so it went. The only song-bird that had forced itself upon the consciousness of these women had been the one which is so insistent that one must listen who is not stone-deaf.

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She had felt impatient scorn of all this yesterday, and of them, but to-day somehow as she looked at these same people—in the mass—that impatience softened to pity. How much they missed out of life! They who had never been taught to see. . . . And why? Why should they be so dwarfed of soul in the midst of all this prodigality of Nature? They might as well live on South Halsted Street and look at brick and mortar all their lives! It did not seem fair. They hadn't had their chance, these people, any more than the South Halsted dwellers had had theirs. Look at that Mooney girl now!

At a favourable moment after the singing Eleanor had put into Eczema's hands a child's picture paper, one begged from Juddie. The girl's ambition to learn had touched her, and the dying out of the light in her face as the coveted "papers and things" of a possible Sunday school slipped away from her at her (Eleanor's) own words had stayed with her ever since. She was thinking as she watched the girl now that this picture paper was to Eczema what a fresh *Century* or *Harper* would be to herself on a winter evening, her feet on the fender, and the world shut out. How she was devouring it—tracing the words with her forefinger and laboriously moving lips and jaws in the delving for the hid treasure within. With just a little more education, a little more broadening of the horizon, what a different world would be opened up to this child! She had almost grasped the key. What a shame that she couldn't come to school, or to— . . . Well, she could come to Sunday school—her father had

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said so. Sunday was his leisure day—and she was his pride. . . . What would not even a Sunday school with its papers and books be to a girl of fourteen, eager to learn. It was purely the intellectual side of the case that appealed to Miss Dinwoody, but she was too true a teacher to feel happy with a natural scholar looking over the fence of her little enclosure and trying helplessly to get in. It was not a pleasant thought and she turned from it to a contemplation of the congregation. How many of them were young people! How many children! She would have most of these in school, she supposed, and she looked at them now with the interest of a partial proprietor. They did not look dull and heavy as their parents did. A whimsical explanation, drawn from her experiences coming down here, came into her mind. Life had not yet "deaded" them. They were a young and vigorous forest growing up; these older ones had been "girdled" by fate and left to slow decay. She had called that "murder" to the stage-driver, speaking of the trees, and had denounced the man guilty of it. But after all a tree, however beautiful, was only a tree! . . . And these children—Eczema Mooney, now——

It is useless to endeavour to follow Miss Dinwoody in all her wanderings away from Mr. Rand's sermon that night—to which she paid outwardly decorous heed. But at the close of the service, while Mr. Burson was making a somewhat halting announcement that, owing to some misunderstanding about the building, the opening of school would be postponed two days until it could be

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put in condition, she passed a folded piece of paper to the minister by way of Neil Gilmer.

The surprise manifested by the congregation at Mr. Burson's announcement, and the glances of delayed criticism directed to the floor, depressed Eleanor as much as its condition. Apparently it had not been observed before. And in noticing the effect upon the pews of Mr. Burson's communication she failed to perceive upon the pulpit the effect of her own. Had she done so, she would have seen a light leap into Willis Rand's face as he read:

"Announce Sunday school for next Sunday. I *am ready now!*"

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XIII

A RECIPROCITY TREATY

THE VINEYARD, Sept. ——.

DEAR MADGE:—How fickle is woman! (and man too, for that matter, for we are all made of the selfsame clay!)

My last letter, declaring my unalterable determination to hold the outposts against so-called "church other one speeds off to tell you that the citadel has fallen and I am a captive! Not only that either, but that I have ingloriously capitulated. I laid down my arms without another shot being fired! Think of it!

Will I please to explain? I will.

Madge, we are going to have a Sunday school at Limestone Ridge and I am to be its head. And if I make the impression upon you that I shall endeavour to make, you will feel before you lay this down that I am not even a ladylike figurehead. Don't ever say positively that you *will not* do *anything*, for that always seems to bring its own punishment in the shape of a reversal.

How did I happen to change my mind?

Well, I suppose it was because of the astuteness of Willis Rand more than any other one thing. You see, that ride I took with him giving out church notices car-

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ried me into many homes that otherwise I might never have entered. If I contemplated holding fast to my resolve not to do the thing he wished me to do (and I certainly did!) I should never have gone on that jaunt. Perhaps I do him injustice. It may be that he had no ulterior motive in extending that invitation—I supposed at the time it was for the pleasure of my society—but in view of the effect it had, I *don't know.*

At any rate, a deep and grinding impression was made upon me that day by the poverty of these people's lives—not only the absence of creature comforts but the lack of all intellectual and spiritual opportunity or stimulus. It seemed almost worse to me somehow than in the city, where you naturally look for such deadness of soul and understand what produces it. But with all this freedom of space, this superabundance of pure air and sunlight—with all the things they can't have in the congested centres—pink sunrises and gorgeous sunsets unobscured by smoke, unhidden by towering buildings,—forests and flowing streams and birds and wild flowers,—it did seem that with all this their lives should have more in them than apparently they had,—not of care—Heaven knows they have enough of that!—but of uplift and outlook that would help them to make the most of what they have and reach out for something higher.

Well, this was the feeling that day left with me. And I wanted to help. I knew I couldn't do much for the older ones—the fathers and mothers—but when I

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thought of the children it seemed to me I might, if I could only find a point of contact—might give them something that would broaden their horizon and perhaps to some extent enrich their lives. You know, Madge, I love children—not in any sentimental way (I have taught too long for that); but I love to watch them develop and to feel that I have absolutely helped them.

It was the church service, though, and the sight of Eczema Mooney, adjudged beyond school age and spelling out a Sunday-school paper, that, more than all else crystallized my determination to begin at the first place that offered. I could write a letter full of that service, Madge, which might perhaps be quite readable to you and the girls. I had it all thought out—the things I would tell you—but somehow when I caught sight of that groping child they all slipped away from me, so you will never get it. I haven't time anyway to-day, for there are such a lot of things I want to talk to you about.

I am deeply interested in this Sunday-school project. You know my old habit of holding off from a thing as long as I can and then throwing myself into it heart and soul. I suppose this will be no exception. It is impossible to tell how it will turn out—it may be a useless giving up of good leisure time—but it does seem now as if it would be one little corner of the vineyard that I might till—besides my school row. It won't make much show, and it may not help much, but it happens to be the one thing I can do,—and there is so much needed!

Yes, I remember all the things I used to say against

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Sunday schools—that their want of discipline undid on Sunday all that we had done in that way the rest of the week,—that the mothers ought to teach their children at home, etc., etc. But I never had been in the Ozarks then. What could the Mooney mothers, for instance, do at teaching what they themselves do not know, and have never had any chance to know?

But if there is credit due anybody for this change of heart in me it is to Aunt Ailsy of Crow's Roost, who has come to my relief. Had I remained in the position and frame of mind I was in that never-to-be-forgotten day when Mr. Rand asked this of me, there would never have been a Sunday school presided over by Miss Dinwoody! But with Aunt Ailsy singing over my washtubs I am feeling much more religious than on that occasion. Don't you suppose people often imagine they are religious when it is only that they are comfortably situated?

Bess is carrying out the principle of reciprocity by getting Aunt Ailsy's dress ready for her to try on. Aunt Ailsy, by the way, has the graceful figure of a large meal sack tied loosely—very loosely—in the middle. It is not one well adapted to the narrow skirt, but Bess has some ingenuity and I some determination, so I guess we will manage it.

Reciprocity!

That is the keynote of life, Madge. I suspected as much the first time I gave a customer a basket of grapes and got a dozen eggs in exchange—an ecstatic moment, and one not often repeated, alas!—and I am certain of it

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now with Bess sitting in the cool of her bedchamber doing the thing she knows so well how to do, and Aunt Ailsy at the tubs, crooning contentedly over *her* specialty:

> "Bringin' in the she's! bringin' in the she's!
> I shall come a-joicin', bringin' in the she's!"

Oh, Madge, that sound is music to my soul!

Yes, reciprocity is a great thing, even the ordinary kind; but I am going to propose for your consideration a new and advanced variety, namely: that with the reciprocity all on one side—*your* side. In this arrangement I am suggesting I have nothing to give, but much to ask. And I want the treaty concluded immediately!

Seriously, Madge, we are going to have that Sunday school—it is announced—but we haven't a single thing in the shape of equipment and not one penny with which to buy. It is not a case of temporary mendicancy, either. It is doubtful if we ever will have anything in cold cash to invest in this school, for the people hereabouts have to put all their pennies into shoes, checked gingham, and chewing tobacco. They tell me that sometimes down here a man lays in this latter luxury for *two!* (Wouldn't you like to see a cigarette-smoking girl of the smart set measured up by the side of one of these chewing sisters? All things considered, I rather think my neighbour would prove the larger of the two—as a woman!) But this is a digression.

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You may wonder how under these circumstances I had the temerity to announce the opening next Sunday. I will tell you. I did it relying solely upon you.

When I said we had nothing in the way of equipment I spoke what is not literally true. To be exact, we have a Bible (mine), three Gospel Hymns (Bess's), and an organ that plays of its own volition and keeps it up as long as you pump—a sort of vaudeville performance.

We need singing-books, lesson leaves, Sunday-school papers, and a chart—the kind you use in your infant room, the colors unmodulated. Books we will want later when we start our library, which we certainly will do if I have to conduct a house-to-house canvass (by letter) among my friends and acquaintances. They tell me that city children are growing away, or rather have grown away, from the Sunday-school library, and no wonder, with their own homes filled with books and Andrew Carnegie's benefactions just around the corner,—but my children are just reaching up to them. Don't ever delude yourself into thinking that because you have outgrown a thing your brother on the frontier has no use for it!

Now as to how to get these things. While I rely upon you, I offer this definite plan which only awaits your co-operation. Take the matter of the singing-books.

You know as well as I do that every self-respecting Sunday school of the better class (meaning of course the richer class) always has on hand about three sets of singing-books, that might be marked respectively "obsolete," "obsolescent," and "in use." I assume that your

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school is no exception. Don't think I am criticizing—though it does seem as if that is an unbusinesslike way of tying up capital—I am only stating a fact. The first may generally be found cluttering up the church closets; the second piled on the back seats of the infant room and occasionally mixing themselves impertinently with the "in use" class, to the annoyance of all concerned. Don't you know this is so, Madge?

Well, I want either your "obsolete" or your "obsolescent" books for my Sunday school. The giving of them will enrich us and not impoverish you. If you chance to have outgrown your Gospel Hymns (as I hope you have) send them to Limestone Ridge, for we have just reached that stage.

(Thank you, very much! Express? No. We will be satisfied to have them by freight—*prepaid*. Too bad that parcels post will not take books!)

Now as to lesson leaves.

It is my belief that enough Sunday-school literature is wasted in this country to satisfy the cravings of the whole heathen world. . . . *You don't know how much craving the heathen have for such?* Neither do I. But if it isn't more than the Christian youth who have come under my observation have, it is a negligible quantity.

Madge, have you ever watched to see how a Sunday school disposes of its lesson leaves? Probably not, for you have always had a class of nice, conscientious young girls. *But I have*—once when I was assistant secretary and had the distribution in hand, with plenty of leisure

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(and some inclination) for observation. This is what they do. The boys will tuck them under the cushions, chuckling to themselves and each other over their "cuteness,"—lay them gently on vestibule window sills or registers, with winks and snickers,—drop them by accident,—or stuff them in their pockets to be exhibited at home as proof of attendance, and then forgotten. (Oh, yes, I know there are exceptions. I am speaking of the rule.)

The girls do better. They usually take them home; some will mislay them,—many forget to study them,—and the conscientious *few* will have them in their heads and hands the next Sunday. Now, isn't this true?

Then, every Sunday school buys a maximum number to begin with—*must* do it, I suppose—for they never can tell what the attendance will be, and they seem to feel that they must have a reserve from which to supply those lost, strayed, or stolen. On a rainy Sunday half of the leaves are left over. Of course they can be reduced to pulp afterwards and make material for more Sunday-school literature—but that isn't really a good investment.

A better one, in my judgment—I don't claim infallibility—would be to buy a minimum number of leaves, by which I mean enough for *all* if each takes care of his own and the teacher looks after her absentees; to teach the children that they have a money value, are only loaned to them, and must be returned; and then to collect these regularly and pass them on to some needy school—*preferably Limestone Ridge.*

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Now, why isn't that a perfectly simple and feasible plan of making one dollar do the work of two, and doubling the usefulnes of the lesson leaves?

By it your children will be taught respect for their Sunday-school literature, which they certainly lack now; they will have their attendance constantly directed, without preaching, to the claims upon them of those needier than themselves; they will learn the value of concerted effort in the missionary world, and the satisfaction of personal participation in it. If you can induce your boys to save their lesson leaves for my boys you will be doing far more at bringing the two into sympathy than by collecting the pennies and nickels contributed by their fathers *via* them, with no thought or effort on their part. Isn't that sound? We feel an interest not in those somebody says we *ought* to help but in those we *have* helped.

I know the objections,—the inexpensiveness of the leaves, etc. And that is true. They don't cost much at first hand. But if a thing costs only five cents, it is expensive enough to be unattainable if you don't happen to have the nickel. Well, we haven't the nickel.

Then I suppose most of them *would* forget the first Sunday; but more would remember the next; and after a while a habit of taking thought for the outposts would be established. (You see I feel for the outposts as I didn't once.) And if half of them paid no attention to it (and they won't) you will still have enough leaves returned to supply several indigent schools such as mine.

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Now, Madge, if you teachers are really interested in the "spread of the gospel," as you claim to be, here is a perfectly simple and effective way of securing it. *But the plan won't work itself.*

Of course we would not be studying the lessons at the same time with the rest of the world, but that is immaterial. We are not doing much of anything down here with the rest of the world. Anyway, it makes no real difference whether we start with Paul on his missionary journeys this Sunday or a month hence, seeing that they were concluded a matter of eighteen or more centuries ago.

Will you try to induce your superintendent to give this plan a trial, Madge? And if he won't do it, some of you girls go on with it! Some good and great men lack initiative in small matters. It is our only hope for lesson helps.

I suppose we could get along without Sunday-school *papers,* but when I think of Eczema Mooney I am not inclined to try. With all your children have to read they will not care to keep their papers, I know, and it is too bad to have them go into the waste basket. Tell your girls about Eczema, even to how she got her name and how her "maw" thinks that its coming out of a paper is the cause of her thirst for knowledge—wasn't that funny! Tell them how bare her home is of books and papers—you can't exaggerate it—and then see how many are willing to save their papers to send to her and her kind. They will be glad to do it, Madge. I know girls. It is

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only the concrete case they need to enlist their efforts. That is all men and women need. Let some necessity arise and don't you know how quickly people respond? Oh, I have great faith in human nature—the sympathetic side of it, at any rate.

And, Madge, do you know I think all this will be as good for your children as mine—in a different way. I am not sure that the reciprocity is going to *be* all on one side. We will be supplying you with a tangible object upon which to expend your energies. That is something.

I had almost forgotten the chart. I don't see how that can be managed—much as I want it. As I remember, it comes quarterly and it wouldn't do us much good unless we had it while we are having the lessons that go with it. . . . No, I think we will have to give that up. I'm sorry. Wouldn't my children's eyes stand out over those pictures?

I have written a long letter and haven't told you a word about the family or the finances. I really feel a trifle easier on the latter score. With twenty bushels of potatoes in the cellar, and squirrels and "cotton-tails" coming in freely as the boys gain skill, I can afford to draw a long breath now and then. And we are making the most of the vineyard. I have sold some grapes, or rather exchanged them—mainly for provender. Thus far, it has been so exclusively barter with me that I feel as if I ought to have strings of *wampum*. We have made jam and jelly and are starting in on grape juice—

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hoping it may become the national beverage, and wishing to be in on the ground floor when that time comes.

Oh, yes, there's another thing! I have been invited to join a club. No, not for the study of art but for the consumption of beef! Mr. Burson sent this man over here—he is a farmer named Duggins, living a few miles east of us, I believe—to see if I wanted to join a "beef club." He asked if I had ever belonged to one. I was obliged to admit that I never had—I had belonged to a bridge club and a Browning club, but I hadn't got as far as beef. I am afraid I was a little satirical, for it did seem to me that Mr. Burson had developed an unsuspected and unjustifiable vein of humour to be sending a man to *me* as a possible member of such a fraternity.

But my satire rolled off. I could see that somehow my stock rose as soon as I mentioned the bridge club. "Yes," he said, wagging his head wisely, "I've heared of them clubs. They are sort of a good roads association, ain't they? Waal, now, I'm glad to see women takin' an interest in sech things. Nothin' helps a country more."

He was a road builder himself, he went on to say, and he told me of the culverts and bridges he had constructed in this country. *I let it rest right there.* In the presence of a man who had spent his life bridging the chasms and making straight the highway for the belated feet of this people, my kind of "bridge" seemed inconsequential.

It appears that a "beef club" is a sort of amiable rural Mafia, organized for the purpose of slaughtering

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not one's fellow beings, but beeves—each member contributing an animal once in so often. I stopped him there to assure him sadly that I was not eligible. Having nothing to contribute but "beef eaters," I should be forced to decline membership.

He remarked something about a "yearlin'" that he had heard I possessed, but I replied with some sex pride that my "yearlin'" was what Juddie called a "girl calf," and I was saving her and her mother and her little sister to start a herd in anticipation of the creamery that might some time come. You may not know it, Madge, but in the bovine realm our sex is not at a discount!

Well, Mr. Duggins departed, and I shall have to stick to squirrels and rabbits for a while yet. It makes my mouth water to think of a nice juicy steak—but after all "quail on toast" isn't bad! and we will have that after November 1, Neil says. You see I am law-abiding.

I really must stop. It is after midnight and I have been superintending a woman at the schoolhouse all day.

Faithfully, NELL.

P. S.—I find that I have omitted all mention of the postage that is to get this literature to us, and particularly of where it is to come from. The reason for this is that I don't know.

Perhaps—well, yes—that is, maybe——

Madge did you ever hear of the man that was asked to select an appropriate hymn to be sung at the funeral of his third wife? His choice was:

"In some way or other the Lord will provide."

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XIV

THE WHEELS BEGIN TO TURN

IT was the noon hour at Limestone Ridge, and the mistress of the schoolhouse sat writing at her desk alone.

Without, through the open windows came to her the far-off voices of children at play, mingled with the nearer whir and chirp of insects, talking as they do at this time of year about nobody knows what—their winter larders perhaps—taking thought, as do we wiser folk, of a morrow that may never come.

Over the valley hung the golden haze of the Indian summer, and the hills were an arabesque of bronzes and mottled greens and mahoganies and russet reds—the dignified colours of a noble race—the pattern picked out here and there with a thread of scarlet where some venturesome vine had climbed to the tree-tops and then dropped helplessly. Under the much-prized hickories where the boys might be found, the leaves lay yellow as gold, and the old trees lifted up their bald and hoary heads and shook defiance to the winds that had despoiled them, and cast their remaining treasures recklessly at the feet of the shouting urchins.

There had been sharp touches of frost that had sent the colour mounting everywhere. Then soft, balmy south

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winds blew; the atmosphere, responsive, mellowed and grew warm; the smoke of the red men's campfires pervaded the air—and Indian summer was upon them.

It was a time to be glad one was alive.

In the schoolroom Eleanor Dinwoody looked at the clock, took up another sheet, and wrote rapidly. It was almost time to ring the bell and her letter to Madge was unfinished. She sometimes wondered what she would have done without that sympathetic ear into which to pour her fears and her perplexities, yes, and her hopes as well, and the humorous record of her days. For after the first tenseness of her trying position relaxed she found, somewhat to her surprise, that life still had its charms.

They were not going to starve—she knew that now—and it was a good thing for these growing, developing boys to be here instead of in the city. What would there be for them in Chicago but temptation? what in the nature of responsibility that would stretch them up to the stature of men? There they would in the very nature of the case be dependent wholly upon her—would not even have the beneficent and steadying influence in her steam-heated flat of *chores!* Here they felt themselves in a way providers, and were day by day rising to meet a man's estate.

In this, it is true, they had had some assistance, first from Mr. Burson in the matter of firewood, and later from the young housewives.

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"Haven't we any meat?" Tom asked one day, sitting down to a repast of baked potatoes and grapes and but little more.

"Have you brought in any?" he was asked. "We haven't seen it." And Hunter, the younger, who had yesterday furnished an epicure's feast of frogs' legs, grinned, feeling very virtuous.

It was good for them, this thrusting of responsibility upon them that they could not shirk except to their own discomfort. Fortunately the woods were not lacking in small game nor the streams in fish. When the hunt was unsuccessful, the Dinwoodys told themselves and each other that meat was said by some to be injurious—and did without—a species of abstemiousness that is not without its effect on character. However, they could shoot "pa'tridges" now, it being November, and the anticipated "quail on toast" became a toothsome reality. Occasionally during this season of migration they brought in wild ducks (usually of Neil's shooting, but not bearing his superscription). They were promising the housekeeper wild turkey for Thanksgiving.

As has been noted, the running gear of the domestic machinery at The Vineyard had been perceptibly eased up by the appearance on the scene of Aunt Ailsy. Its complete lubrication was effected in the working out of an inspiration of Miss Dinwoody's.

When school opened, a goodly number of children appeared,—enough to verify Mr. Burson's statement that "the woods were full of 'em,"—enough indeed to have

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appalled a less experienced teacher. But Eleanor was stout of heart, vigorous of body, warm of sympathies—and *knew how.* That is a combination not easily overthrown. The motley collection of ungraded, untrained school material settled into place as by magic under her practised hand.

But as she looked her flock over there was one face she missed—that of Eczema Mooney. The child had made an unreasonably deep impression upon her; she felt this, but after all it *was* hard that one reaching out for better things should be constantly denied. She pondered the case for three days. Then she said to her niece:

"Bess, you have too much to do. Suppose we have Eczema Mooney here this winter to go to school and work for her board. Have you counted the cans lately? Could we risk it?"

Bess looked ruefully at her reddened hands. "Aunt Nell, I'd go on half rations to do it!"

"We'll get her if we can," Eleanor said, after some consultation as to details. "As Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch says, 'It will just mean putting another dipper of water in the soup and each of us going without a slice of bread.'"

And so it came about that the next day, which was Saturday, saw Eleanor under the escort of Neil Gilmer making another pilgrimage to "Mount Roosevelt." She had pursued a devious course that day with Willis Rand, and feared to trust her memory of the road; but Neil,

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when he heard what was to be gained, was eager to pilot the way.

Mrs. Mooney's objections were numerous and explicit. Eczemy was needed at home.

Couldn't this nice big girl take her place as helper? Miss Dinwoody asked, throwing at Marissa—next in the line of succession—a smile so winning, so stimulating, that Marissa was instantly fired with ambition and protested her hitherto unappreciated ability.

Well, they didn't have no money to buy books; looked like they couldn't hardly keep in shoes. The family feet, even Mrs. Mooney's—now modestly withdrawn behind the folds of a dress most fortunately longer and fuller than the prevailing style,—verified this.

Miss Dinwoody replied to this that she would furnish school books—and reading books too—with a promising smile at Eczema, whose eyes glowed and turned hungrily toward her reluctant parent.

Then Eczemy didn't have no clothes that was fittin'.

Miss Dinwoody's fighting blood was now up.

Her niece had some things, a dress and cloak, several things in fact, that would just about fit Eczema, she thought, and being in mourning now, etc., etc. As she spoke her mind was groping in the depths of trunks and closets, seeking confirmation of this.

Jepson Mooney was sent for, Eczema prudently going on this errand herself, and Neil added such arguments as were at his command. When the father and daughter reached the cabin Eleanor saw the battle was won.

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"I'm mightily obleeged to *you*-all fer givin' my gal the chance," he said . . . "*Shore* we kin git along without her, maw. We *got* to! Marissy here will take her place, won't you, sis? Then maybe yo' time will come some day."

Eleanor's heart warmed at the encouraging smile he threw Marissa. Under his rough exterior was a father's heart.

He would bring her down the next day to Sunday school. (Yes, maw, she could! she could wash her dress this evenin' and be ready—Eczema eagerly acquiescing.)

"I wisht I could bring you somethin' to sorter help pay," he said haltingly, as they were concluding arrangements. "But they's a whole pack of us and we're powerful pore!"

"That's all right, Mr. Mooney," she assured him. "I only want Eczema. I shall expect her to help us with the work—as she does at home—and she will earn her way. It should be a part of every girl's education to study home-making."

"You won't have to learn her much about that," said Mrs. Mooney, with complacency. "Eczema kin make as good corn pone as I kin."

"Eczema ain't afraid of work," her father said, laying an affectionate hand on the girl's shoulder. "She's like her grandmaw—that's my mother."

"But you better hide the books," cautioned Mrs. Mooney, to whom this reference was like a dissertation on

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"mother's pies," "she's like her grandmaw in that too, from what I kin hear."

And so the little hill girl dropped into a new and wonderful world of books and pictures and pianos, and silver spoons and fairy stories—and white nightgowns. And the fairy stories she liked best of all,—and used up her leisure time reading them to Juddie,—Cinderella being her best beloved.

Then for her contribution she told him wonderful tales of ghosts and witches and wizards.

"What's wizards?" asked Juddie.

His reaching out for information was thwarted by a peremptory call from the window under which they sat.

"Eczema," said Miss Dinwoody, sternly, when the girl stood before her, "I don't wish you to say such things as that to Juddie. There is no such creature as a wizard—nor a witch either." Then with a whimsical glance at Bess, "Witches went out of fashion hundreds of years ago, even in New England, and wizards never really came in."

"But there's a wizard here in the Ozarks," reiterated Eczema, stoutly, "because my maw has saw him."

"Seen him," corrected Miss Dinwoody, automatically.

"Seen him. She seen him once when——"

"*Saw* him, Eczema. She saw him."

"Law, Miss Eleanor!" exclaimed the girl in exasperation, "I can't never get the straight of them two words! Whichever one I say somebody takes it by the tail and twis'es it right out of my mouth! Anyway,"

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returning to the charge, "there *is* wizards—'cause my maw has—has looked one in the face!" she concluded triumphantly, being a person of resources. "There was a old woman once, over on North Ridge—named Granny Dunham—and her eyes had all gone out, so she couldn't see nothin', and this wizard he come and tuk her off to a place in the woods, and stuck things in her eyes—knives and things—and blindfolded her and kep' her there a long time, and when he brung her back she could see as good as anybody! And after that she made a Risin' Sun quilt, for my maw has—has—*seen* it."

"Correct. Though I don't believe your story is. Now, wasn't that man a doctor?"

"No, ma'am, he wasn't! Hit was jest a plain wizard!"

And a wizard he remained, to both Eczema and Juddie.

Curiously enough this same belief cropped out one day in school, though in a little different form.

They happened to come across the word in the reading class.

"What do you understand by a wizard?" asked Eleanor, remembering her bout with Eczema.

The girl looked about her half in fear and dropped her voice.

"It's—it's a man—(anyway, it looks like a man)—what carries off little boys, and—and plants their crooked knees."

"That does what?"

The accusation was repeated.

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"Nonsense! Bring me that dictionary." She found it and read with what impressiveness she could summon (for the dictionary did not say what she expected or desired it to say)— "'One supposed' (by ignorant people, that means) 'to be in league with the devil; a male witch; a sorcerer.' You see it doesn't say anything about children at all. Now, do you think you understand it?"

She knew that was impossible, but it was a subject she found beyond her with this audience.

The child groped for a form of words. "Yessum. It's a man—what leaks like the devil, and—he don't say anything to children at all, but"—old beliefs die hard—"he carries off little boys—and plants their crooked knees."

"Go on with your reading! It is nothing of the kind. And there is no such thing as a wizard anyway."

She knew from their faces that the belief was too deep-seated to combat successfully. From the blackboard Eczema looked her triumph.

"Where in the world do you suppose they ever got such a notion?" Eleanor asked Bess that night in retailing the incident.

"From their 'maws.' That is where Eczema got hers."

"If only the multiplication table and correct English could be passed down by their 'maws,' how easy life would be!" sighed Eleanor.

But life was not all work at Limestone Ridge. Dur-

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ing these lovely fall days there had been more than one nutting party for the Dinwoodys, Neil leading as pilot; with basket dinners eaten out of hand beside some bubbling spring; and for reward—if indeed such jaunts are not their own reward—great bags of hickory nuts and a few walnuts laid by against long winter evenings—the latter imparting a most coveted brown to two pairs of boyish hands that sought to bring ocular proof that they too were to this manner born.

Once there was a picnic down on the river at the place where the bluffs rose bristling above them on the other side, and they fished from a boat by turns, there being only one, and caught sunfish and perch and a great black bass, to whose serving up for Sunday dinner Neil was bidden on the spot. It was always Neil and the family—and they came to love him, every one,—the big-hearted, sunny-natured boy.

Then there were horseback rides for the two young people—for Bess was learning the art—and Eleanor would stand in the door and wave them off and think sometimes of Willis Rand and his lonely rides. He had not been back since his services at Limestone Ridge, but he had written to her asking if she would not write him a report of her new venture and how it prospered. He would be back sometime, in November perhaps, but in the meantime he was relying upon her to hold things together.

To this she had sent a humorous reply, telling of the

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Sunday school and her remarkable success in obtaining literature.

"So encouraged are we," she wrote, "that Bess is indulging in the pipe-dream of a future Y. P. S. C. E. (Can't you suggest a few more letters for that abbreviation? It doesn't seem to me quite long enough for Limestone Ridge!) It may never materialize, but I certainly never saw a church so urgently in need of Christian endeavour as this one—especially about its floors and lamps.

"Bess is inclined to accuse me of levity in saying this, but I am in dead earnest. That is where *my* endeavor has already started. If you and she will attend to the godliness of this parish I will see after the cleanliness—at least of its house of worship. I am going to start the big boys of my Sunday school at work on a *mud hole* this next week. There is one near the schoolhouse that is disgraceful and dangerous. I don't know any kind of Christian endeavour which they could engage in that would be so fruitful of results as this. You may want to revoke our charter, but we will get done what we can before you come."

To this he replied, "Your're on the right trail. *Don't lose the scent.*" A postscript said:

"I suggest that your name—the society's, I mean, be Y. P. S. C. E. per E. D."

The Chicago response to Eleanor's appeal had indeed been prompt and generous They were more than glad, —they were grateful, Miss Dixon wrote, to have the

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privilege of aiding in her work The children took it up enthusiastically, as she had predicted, and were already hunting up books for the wished-for library. After this had come a brand new chart direct from the publisher, which was the personal gift of the superintendent. It was to speak of this that her letter was prolonged. She was reading over now the closing pages.

"Give my warmest thanks to Mr. Shaddock for his gift. I have written to him of course, but I want to express my gratitude again. His sending this at this time as a free-will offering only proves that when you really need a thing and *have* to have it, somebody is raised up to supply it. I believe that, Madge. I didn't once, you remember.

"I want to tell you—and him—how I use it. With you the chart's field of usefulness is limited to the primary room,—with me it is made the basis of instruction for the whole school. We have but two classes, since we have but two teachers, and they range in age and attainments from Juddie to Neil Gilmer. Bess has the younger ones and I their elders. We teach our individual classes the best we can and then I take them all for a general summary. I find the chart invaluable here in focussing attention. *And attention I will have.* It is as necessary on Sunday as on Monday,—many good people to the contrary notwithstanding. If I don't do anything else for this community by the time I give up, I certainly will have taught them how to listen.

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"But the chart's life is not done with that one day, nor even with the quarterly review. Each Sunday, as the lesson proceeds, I watch carefully to see which child knows it best, and at its close his or her name is written on that page with the understanding that at the end of the quarter, when we are through with it, that particular picture shall go to him. (We really do need a pronoun invented to meet such cases as this, for usually the *him* referred to should be rendered *her*.)

"It is astonishing how much a feeling of proprietorship does for us in enhancing interest! I think I was *inspired* when I fell upon this plan. The children look forward with the greatest eagerness to the time when they can take these works of art home. Sometimes they bring their mothers or fathers to Sunday school to get a glimpse of their particular picture. We are going to have a grand review and presentation at the end of the quarter. Of course I shall take care that the pictures do not all go to the same ones. Sometimes I unexpectedly announce that this time it will be awarded for the best attention—or for the most marked improvement in either attention or scholarship, so you see I wield a three-edged sword. It is great fun! It is as absorbing as a game of bridge—and the interest lasts longer."

She smiled as she read this and took up her pen for a postscript. "Don't think I am growing wings," she wrote, "or that I have renounced bridge. I should like a game this very——"

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A sound at the door caused her to raise her eyes. The sentence was not finished. Neil Gilmer was advancing toward her, his face full of something she had never seen there before.

"Neil!" she cried sharply, "what is it? Is it Juddie?"

"Yes," he said. "It's Juddie."

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XV

JUDDIE DISCOVERS A FRIEND

"HE has met with an accident; not serious, I hope, but—his arm is broken."

Instinctively she reached for her hat and was pinning it on, and without conscious design her hands were gathering up the papers on her desk.

Not serious—a broken arm! with hospitals and surgeons and trained nurses leagues away! The thought flashing through her brain like sheet lightning was of what Willis Rand had called the Ozarks—a mammoth dome. And she and Juddie were on the top of it—everybody else had disappeared, especially the doctors—and Juddie with a broken arm! An overpowering feeling of accountability was upon her. Had she brought him out into the wilderness to die? Such was the passionate cry of her soul at this moment.

She stepped to the open window.

"Eczema!" she called, and when the child came, "I am going home. Juddie has been hurt. Ring the bell and when the children come in tell them they can have a holiday. They are to come on Monday. . . . I am ready, Neil."

On the way he gave her the details. Juddie had been climbing or trying to climb a tree. He had lost his hold

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and fallen, cutting his face quite severely and breaking his arm between the wrist and the elbow. Bess was in the house, and hearing his cries had run to his assistance and carried him to the house. The cut on his head was bleeding profusely and she was so occupied with that that she did not discover at first the injury to the arm. When she did she realized she must have assistance and ran down to the road to see if anybody was in sight. Fortunately, Job Tatum was passing and she had sent him up to Crow's Nest for him.

"For you! Why didn't she send him for me?"

"I suppose she thought I could get help quicker than you could, and she was right, for uncle was just starting off on his horse and he was there almost as soon as I was."

"Your uncle! What made you think of asking him to go?"

"The man told me Juddie's arm was broken and I knew you would have to have some one to set it."

"But your uncle couldn't set it."

"Oh, yes, he could. He set my dog's leg once when I was a boy and Rex never even limped." He laughed. "Uncle said a dog had better blood than most men."

"Why, Neil Gilmer!" said Eleanor, severely, "do you suppose I am going to have Juddie's arm set by a farmer? somebody that has only practised on a collie! I want you to go for a doctor, just as soon as you get me home. How far is the nearest one from here?"

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"I really don't know. We have never had a doctor. Uncle may know. Of course, Miss Nell," he went on after an embarrassed pause, "uncle will not do this if you don't want it done, but you know he is——"

He bit off the words abruptly and the sentence was unfinished, for what reason she did not know. She spent no time in conjecture, however, being busy with her own train of thought, which, to say the least, was far from complacent. Here was a fresh complication. If this old man had come intending or expecting to set this limb it might be difficult to get rid of him. But it would have to be done, she told herself with tightening lips, even at the risk of offending Neil, for she certainly would not risk Juddie in such hands as this. Had set a collie's leg, indeed!

"Drive faster, Neil." That old man might even now have begun, she was thinking, and Bess couldn't do anything with him of course.

Neil tightened his lines and gave the horse a cut and they rode in silence after this. The boy had his own private causes for abstraction. His manly young heart was singing a little pæan all its own. *It was to him that Bess had turned first of all.*

In the doorway Eleanor stopped, herself unobserved. The couch in the living-room had been transformed into a hospital bed, save in height, and on the tightly stretched sheet lay Juddie in a fresh gown with his right sleeve rolled up to the shoulder. His head was a network of tidy bandages and his breast was still heaving with soft

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sobs. Over him bent a tall form and a pair of broad shoulders surmounted by a head of slightly curling iron-gray hair touched heavily with frost across the back. The face she could not see, but the hands were pinning the bandage over the eye. It occurred to her, even in that first hurried look that saw so little and yet took in so much, that they were not like a surgeon's white hands, though they were certainly deft and competent. The man was saying soothing words to the frightened child. Bess was nowhere in sight.

A feeling of positive bewilderment came over Eleanor Dinwoody. . . . They had got the doctor then. But where? And how? with Neil gone for her. Who was he? Somebody, evidently, that understood his business if his self-possession meant anything . . . And where was the old gentleman, Mr. Gilmer? Had Bess already dismissed him? That was a relief at any rate.

Then Bess came in from the dining-room and discovered her and cried out joyfully and with infinite relief, "Here's Aunt Nell, Juddie, dear!" and Juddie gave a gasping sob, and his well arm was outstretched and she was on her knees by his side, her face close beside his bandaged one, murmuring soft love-talk as women do at such times by instinct and forgetful of all else but that she had him still.

"Mr. Gilmer," sounded Bess's voice, "this is my aunt, Miss Dinwoody."

Eleanor raised her eyes to look into the grave, self-contained, observant ones of the surgeon, who had rested

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from his labours for this love passage but still held firmly the wounded arm.

"Mr. Gilmer?" she repeated in a dazed way. "Mr. Burton Gilmer, Neil's uncle?"

The amazement in her face was so marked, her dismay so apparent, that a faint smile curved the corners of the man's mouth. She noticed now that it was an unusually dark face with eyes as black as night. Its youthfulness belied the tale of the whitening hair. He bowed gravely.

"I am Burton Gilmer," he said.

"I—I thought you were the doctor."

"I have been serving in that capacity in the absence of a better. There were some cuts on the little fellow's face that demanded immediate attention. He had quite a fall."

At the mention of it Juddie's sobs broke forth afresh.

"Aunt Nell, I didn't—*mean*—to do it!"

"No, dearest. Aunt Nell knows you didn't.

"I—I cried for you, Aunt Nell."

"Did you, dear? Well, Aunt Nell is here now. She won't leave you."

Mr. Gilmer called her attention. "I should like to have you see the arm, Miss Dinwoody, before this is put on," motioning to the splint. "It is, as you see, a simple fracture of the ulna—not at all serious, I think,—a child's bones knit readily, you know—but it will be a little tedious and need some care."

He was speaking with the quiet confidence of one sure of himself and seeking to reassure another. She felt the

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relief that comes from reliance on a strong and capable arm. This man knew what he was doing.

"Perhaps I should have asked you whether you wish me to go on with this," he said suddenly, pausing in his work of preparation as though the thought had just occurred to him. "Is there any doctor you would like to have? I doubt if you could find a surgeon. The nearest physician is Dr. Rosser in the town of Swigmore. Neil will go for him if you think best."

"No," she answered with decision. "Go on, please." She had observed his case of instruments—his preparedness for everything. This man was a surgeon, incredible as it seemed.

"I think perhaps I am your best chance." It was said with neither egotism nor idle self-depreciation. "The country doctors are not usually well equipped, though this is a very simple case—the fracture, I mean."

Then in answer to her startled look, "There is some little danger of concussion—perhaps I ought to tell you that—but not much, I think. You can assist me here if you will. . . . Yes, I shall put it in a cast. A child is always restless and it is safer so."

Together they worked over the little patient, he with the quick, sure movements of a practised hand and she following his every direction unquestioningly. When they were through he rewarded her with a nod of professional approval and a smile. "You are as good as a nurse."

"And you as a surgeon," she told him saucily.

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He did not follow this lead.

"Will you be the one to take care of him?"

"Yes." She was sobered into the monosyllable by his ignoring of her badinage.

"You'd better keep him downstairs. The room can be made private by means of these portières. Have you a cot you can put in here for yourself?"

"Yes. But would it not be better for him to be upstairs?"

"No. It would be as well for him, but not for you. You must save yourself."

It was foolish, but a lump rose in the girl's throat. She was not accustomed to saving herself nor to having others mention a need of it. One doesn't often when she happens to be the mother of a family, and Eleanor Dinwoody was all of this, though she had missed parenthood.

Mr. Gilmore gave some directions for the night and promising to return the next morning went off, taking Neil with him. Eleanor had managed to have a private word with the young man first. "Neil!" she whispered dramatically, "if you tell, I'll *never* forgive you!"

She came back into the room, darkened it, and sat down beside the child. She felt that she as well as Juddie needed a quiet hour.

"No, Juddie, I can't tell you a story now. I want you to rest a little while. Shut your eyes now and I will hold your hand."

"I'm not going to sleep," said Juddie, with determination.

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"No, you needn't go to sleep. But we will both close our eyes and rest."

He was more responsive to this program than she herself, for though she had the outward semblance of quiet composure her brain was in a whirl. The black eyes of the surgeon seemed to be upon her, seeking to fathom how much she knew or guessed. And what was there to know or guess? Certainly that he was not an ordinary farmer. That spoke for itself. And he was not old. How had she been deceived into thinking he was old? She remembered now that upon the occasions when she had referred to him as infirm, as too old to be disturbed by the boys, as past going out at night, Neil had always seemed amused at something, but she had never imagined such a thing as this.

The darkness, the weariness, the friendly bandage, and the soothing touch of a trusted hand soon did their work with Juddie. The little fingers relaxed, clutched tightly at the fear of loss, relaxed again, and were gently unclasped.

Behind the closed portières the two girls talked things over.

"What would we have done if it hadn't been for Mr. Gilmer?" wondered Eleanor.

"What would we have done if we hadn't found Neil?" Bess answered with spirit. "It was he that brought him to us."

"Bess, why didn't you send that man for me?"

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"I don't know. I seemed to think of Neil the very first thing."

"Oh, you did?"

"Yes," said the girl, with heightening colour, "and it is fortunate I did. You couldn't have brought Mr. Gilmer."

"He certainly is the last person I should have thought of. Did you know he was a doctor?"

"No. Is he?"

Miss Dinwoody laughed. "Those surgical instruments and his skill in using them do not indicate that he is a piano-tuner! And did you know that he was young?"

"Why, Aunt Nell, he isn't young! He's awfully gray."

Undoubtedly Bess had looked at Mr. Gilmer with the unspectacled eyes of eighteen. Eleanor rose and stood before a mirror in the dining-room touching a whitening lock over her own temple that had always been an annoyance to her. . . . Yes, there were other stray ones here and there.

"What's the matter, Aunt Nell?"

"My hair. It seems to have been shaken up, or down, by that ride. Neil and I didn't lose much time. . . . No, I supposed he was an old man. And when I came in I thought it was some unknown doctor you had found. I didn't dream of its being Mr. Burton Gilmer."

"Aunt Nell, he is lovely! He was so nice to me before you came. I was so frightened, you know, and he told

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me just what to do and everything. You would have thought he had done nothing in his life but take care of people in accidents. You ought to have seen him dress Juddie's head. He didn't hesitate a minute about what to do. And he even dipped that needle of his in boiling water. What did he do that for, Aunt Nell?"

"To sterilize it. But how does he happen to have these instruments? That is what puzzles me. Well, it is certainly fortunate for us that we had him! And it is fortunate that I will have a whole Saturday and Sunday at home too, following this day of disaster." Then the talk turned from the mysterious stranger to more prosaic things.

That night, on her nurse's cot at Juddie's side, Eleanor Dinwoody's mind dwelled much upon her neighbour. It was uneasiness about Juddie of course that kept her awake, she knew that, but since it seemed impossible for her to get to sleep she might as well think of him as anything else, she supposed. In fact, it seemed a little easier than to keep her mind on her school or even on the library, which just now was the absorbing interest with her. How nice it was of Mr. Honn to make her a case for the books, with a lock on it so that she had no fear of harm coming to them—her precious books that would be so much to her children when she had taught them how to make use of them. A library without a librarian to direct really wasn't worth much to a neighbourhood like this. . . . How strange that he had chosen to live his life in a

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place like this! And how funny that it had never occurred to her that he might be young . . . No, not young exactly, as Bess had said, but certainly not old. He appeared like a man in the prime of life, though his hair was undeniably gray. But that was no sure indication of age. Hadn't she found gray hairs in her own head to-day? Yes, she should say he was just about in his prime. An amusing recollection came to her at the word of her once saying to her father that she supposed a man was in his prime at twenty-one. How they had laughed and kept it going afterwards! It hadn't been ridiculous to her then for she herself was only about sixteen, but how absurd it seemed to her now. Think of Neil Gilmer as being in his prime! Why, he was but just begun as a man! . . . Twelve o'clock! . . . Why couldn't she go to sleep?

She determined to do so by counting sheep. Too easy. By the multiplication route. . . . *No go!* . . . He certainly was distinguished looking, with that dark Spanish face, iron-gray hair, and those remarkable teeth. He did not seem the least bit like a farmer. He had the look and bearing of a professional man, and he certainly had had surgical training. She would have discovered that even if she hadn't seen the instruments.

The patient slept, but the nurse tossed on a restless couch.

She would try to remember the names of the books Madge had sent. Perhaps that might bring sleep. There was,—let's see—"The Little Lame Prince," and "Anderson's Fairy Tales," and,—she would say them very

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slowly,—"Black Beauty"—and—*But where had he got his training?* And why, when he was so clearly a surgeon, had he chosen to renounce that life and bury himself here? That must have been long, long ago. She could only guess at his age—his face said one thing and his hair another—but Neil was born at Crow's Roost, and he was twenty-one. It was before that. And why—and why——

Tardy slumber came at last and the enigma was not solved.

The wonder of the thing grew with each day's intercourse. Juddie's hurts, which did not seem serious at first, required attention and Mr. Gilmer was unremitting. Eleanor studied him always as he bent over the child, dressing his arm or skilfully adjusting a fresh bandage. One more unlike her preconceived notions of him could not be imagined, not only in appearance but apparently in character—certainly in manner.

True, he was reticent and self-contained—not given to superfluous speech, but not in the least morose, nor—her cheek flushed with shame as she remembered the term she had used in regard to him—nor *grouchy*. To Juddie he was gentleness itself, lifting him in his strong arms sometimes and walking back and forth to rest him. On Sunday morning he had insisted upon staying with the child, so that they might all go to Sunday school, for this was to be the opening day for the new library, and Neil as librarian had a most faultlessly prepared book to be put into use to-day. The children had been prepared for

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the "opening," and it did seem too bad to disappoint them.

Juddie, strangely enough, seemed not to care who stayed. He was sleeping a good deal. In fact, when they returned elated with the success of the "opening," Mr. Gilmer reported with evident concern that he had slept most of the time.

"Can you be with him this week?" he asked of Eleanor before he left. Then as her startled eyes questioned him, "I would rather you watched him yourself for a few days. He has some fever and I don't like it. Could your niece take your school?"

"Yes, if it is necessary."

And it was so arranged.

The next morning he was not so well, nor the next. Mr. Gilmer came twice a day now, and Eleanor found herself watching feverishly for the hour.

On Tuesday night after he had examined him Mr. Gilmer said casually, "If you will give up your nurse's cot to me I believe I will stay with him to-night."

She lifted a white, strained face to his.

"Is he——"

"He is not so well to-night. Nothing alarming, I think, but if there should be a change I would like to be here to watch it." Then firmly, as she hesitated, "One of us must be in the house, either Neil or myself, to-night. You might need help. And it is better that I should be the one. Besides," he added, looking down into her pinched face, "you need rest yourself."

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SHE STOLE SOFTLY DOWN THE STAIRS INTO THE DINING-ROOM, AND PEERED THROUGH THE PORTIERES.

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She turned away, sick with dread, thankful to have the direction taken by a stronger hand. They all felt the tension of the hour. Even the boys talked in low tones and went to bed early; and the girls soon followed,—Eczema and Bess. After making all preparations for Mr. Gilmer's comfort, Eleanor went to her room and lay down, but not to sleep. It was hers to count the hours as they were tolled off by the clock downstairs. At one o'clock she could endure it no longer, and slipping into a kimono she stole softly down the stairs into the dining-room, and peered through the portières.

Mr. Gilmer sat by the couch in a rocking chair, Juddie sleeping quietly but with quick breath.

"Come in," he said in a low voice, without turning.

She came in and stood a moment on the opposite side of the bed, then drew up a chair and sat down.

"How is he?"

"No change—which is favourable. Have you slept?"

"No."

For a long time they remained thus, not speaking except an occasional word about the patient. She laid her head back at last against her chair and closed her eyes. If Juddie died it didn't seem as if she could go on! She would feel that it had all been a failure. . . . She was not conscious of being asleep, but after a while she felt a light touch on her shoulder. Mr. Gilmer was standing beside her.

"Go to bed, child."

To her surprise she found her eyes wet with sudden

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tears. How long it had been since anybody had called her "child"!

"I think I will," she said, unsteadily. "Good-night."

In the dim light she groped her way, and seeing that she was still half asleep, he took her hand and led her to the stairs. The clock struck three.

"Good-night," he said, very gently. "I will call you if there is the slightest need. You may trust me."

The morning found the crisis past. There was nothing needed now, Mr. Gilmer said, but patience. The resilience of a child's physical nature was one of the wonders of the world. The whole house felt the relief.

With the lightening of the gloom Eleanor's mind reverted often to the question that had been almost forgotten in the anxiety of these last strained hours: This man was a surgeon. Why was he here a farmer? What was the mystery of his life? For mystery she was sure there was.

When Aunt Ailsy came over a day or two later for extra work Eleanor determined (a little shamefacedly, if the truth were known) to put a question to her, a casual one, just such a question as anybody might with propriety ask, and as she herself, if it were put to her, would willingly answer. In fact, it had been asked and answered many times since she had been down here. Still she would propound it incidentally, as it were, and not at all as if it were with a purpose. All of which minute planning, if she had stopped to think, might have con-

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vinced Miss Dinwoody that there was something not quite objectionless in her question.

She went out to the kitchen to make Juddie some toast and while there talked freely with Aunt Ailsy as was her wont, detailing domestic incidents in her various places of abode—giving them by name; then, quite as if it were a matter of the same kind of interest,

"Aunt Ailsy, I have never heard you speak of *your* old home. Where did you live before you came here?"

"Law, Miss Eleanor," said the old woman, cannily, dipping a pillow-case up and down and rubbing at an invisible speck, "I been livin' here so long, and my remembry is so bad, I done clean forgot the name o' that place. Yaas'm, I is!"

And Eleanor's cheeks flamed.

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XVI

THE WIZARD OF THE OZARKS

THEY were sitting by the child's bedside one day soon after this, Eleanor and Mr. Gilmer. He was able to be dressed now and the bandages were off. In fact, his recovery had been so rapid and steady that his nurse and doctor were feeling unusually cheerful this afternoon. She might be back in school next week, Mr. Gilmer had told her, and she had jested with him and the boy about getting rid of them. It was very easy to fall into familiar converse with him now, she found; she could hardly believe she had known him but a week or had disliked him ever. Few persons come as close to us as the doctor with whom we have fought a winning fight.

He still came every day to dress the arm, and it was for this formality that Juddie was now bolstered up on the couch, for he insisted upon seeing that it was well done. His big eyes were following every movement with greatest interest. Mr. Gilmer was preparing the sling that was to go around his neck when he asked sweetly and without warning, "Are you Neil's Uncle Grouch?"

"Why, *Juddie!*"

Miss Dinwoody turned a shocked face upon him.

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Mr. Gilmer spread out the sling and folded with the greatest exactness, his lips twitching.

"I am Neil's uncle, and I suspect I may be sometimes called his Uncle Grouch."

"That's what we call you—Aunt Nell and Bess and me. Aunt Nell said she thought that was your name."

"*Juddie!*" Eleanor's face was crimson.

"You did, Aunt Nell. Or maybe you said it *ought* to be Uncle Grouch."

She turned from the child to the man sitting unmoved beside the couch, folding bandages.

"Mr. Gilmer, I am simply overcome with mortification."

"You needn't be," he said quietly. "It is quite true."

"Oh, it isn't true! We ought never to have said it! . . . And after all your kindness to us! I think Juddie would have died but for you."

"Perhaps I was christened before you knew me."

"Oh, it was—long before we had even seen you—or had a right to say anything——" she stumbled on. "I know what he means. It was the very day we got here. Mr. Burson had been so kind and good, and Mrs. Burson had come over and swept out the house for us because she thought we would be homesick, and Neil had run over to help Mr. Burson unload; and he told Bess that you had said he'd better wait until he was asked for his help—that the truest kindness was to let people alone—and it came over me so how dreadful it would have been if everybody had stood off and let us alone, and—and that

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was how I happened to say it. For of course you know I did say it. I didn't even know Juddie heard me until afterwards when he began to say it himself. And then it sounded so funny in him that we didn't stop him as we ought to have done. . . . Mr. Gilmer, I am so distressed! You have been *so* good to us through all this. I think"—her voice broke—"I think if it hadn't been for you I should—have given up."

Her head went down on the pillow close to Juddie's mystified face.

He laid a fleeting touch on her hand.

"Don't think anything more of it, child. Life is too full of real trouble to shed tears over a foolish thing like this. You are overwrought and worn out. Leave the boy with your niece, who is just coming, and get your hat. I am going to take you for a little drive. It is air you need."

When they were out in the open, drawing in great breaths of nerve-toning ozone, he talked to her about any and every thing that was remote from the unfortunate subject,—herself, her hopes in coming here, her disappointments, her school.

"How has your niece found school-teaching? Pretty hard?"

"I think she will be glad to change with me next week. There is one man who has made it difficult for her—a Mr. Schlitz. Do you know him?"

"I've heard of him. He will make it disagreeable for you too."

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"Not long. I don't feel afraid of him. But Bess is inexperienced."

She told him about the library and what she hoped from it. He listened with greatest interest.

"You haven't any books you want to contribute?" she suggested.

"I might have some Patent Office reports."

"Thank you so much. I believe I won't start them on that diet. But if you had some reports from the agricultural department I might accept. This library is not to be exclusively a Sunday-school affair. I have large plans for it. If I could find any documents that would help these boys to be better farmers they would certainly go into circulation,—from my Sunday-school library."

"Perhaps we could find some. Such things are easily obtained. And they are cheap. I suppose that counts with you."

"It outcounts everything at present. We have no money. But we are going to have a library. Now you see if we don't. I have written fifteen letters to as many different friends and acquaintances asking them to send me books they can spare from their own libraries. We will start with children's books but we will not stop with that. This is going to be a neighbourhood library."

"You were pretty plucky to undertake that Sunday school. How is it progressing?"

"Finely. I am amazed to see how well. You must

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come to our Christmas tree. It's going to be a neighbourhood affair."

"I don't go out much—at night," he said, gravely.

"Mr. Gilmer! Did Neil tell you that? Well, you see I thought you were old, just as Mrs. Burson thought I was. She said she knew that old lady would be homesick—and she was right."

They felt the exhilaration of the frosty air and perhaps of mind upon mind, and laughed and jested like children as the horse sped along.

"I never should have started the Sunday school," she said, reverting to that, "if it hadn't been for that trip I took with Mr. Rand. But when I saw the poverty of these people's lives—how little they have to enjoy except material things, and how precious little of that! I felt that I wanted to do something—for the children, at any rate—to enlarge their vision. Besides,—I am here now with my children, *to stay*. I feel that I have to help make this neighbourhood what I want it to be. You know how that is, having had Neil to think of."

He was not specially responsive to this and she went on with glee, "I suppose nobody ever saw just such a Sunday school as mine is. You see I am not amenable to any church court, and don't have to be conventional—nor orthodox. I give them exactly what the exigences of the case demand,—be it secular or sacred. Bess has the younger ones in front and teaches them the usual things—the Commandments, the Beatitudes, etc. And I take the larger ones and give them on Sunday what I think

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ought to be wrought into their lives seven days in the week for all time—not meaning any reflection upon the Commandments and the Beatitudes, which certainly are on that line—but you see mine are a little too old to take to Bess's kind of teaching.

"My plan is an outgrowth of the circumstances. When we began we had no lesson leaves, but I hunted up an old one among the children's things and found it was about the ancient kings and their trials with the Hittites and Hivites; and I sat up till twelve o'clock one night reading my Bible to get the thread of the narrative and keep the connection. I never have seen any close connection between the Hittites and Hivites and these benighted children of the Ozarks yet, but maybe the International Committee sees it.

"There was a much larger attendance at Sunday school than I expected that morning, particularly among the big boys. If it hadn't been in a schoolroom I think I might have been stagestruck. Even as it was, I thought of the Hittites with some trepidation and wondered where the point of contact might be found. As it turned out I didn't need it, on account of my introduction of myself.

"I told them that I had come from a long distance—Washington, D.C. I might have said Chicago with more truth, but my good angel put it into my head to name the capital city instead. 'Washington,' repeated John Haley, the young mail carrier who had brought my nephew down here, 'that's where Gov. Majors stays,

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ain't it?' 'It is where the President stays,' I told him mildly. 'Oh, yes—sure!' he said. 'The President—why, sure!' and he nodded his head as one does at a faintly remembered name. I really believe he had thought that Governor Major was the chief executive of the nation."

"Doubtless," remarked Mr. Gilmer. "I know John's family."

"Well," Eleanor went on, "the Hittites retired to the background! The point of contact was found. John Haley is seventeen years old—he told Tom so—and in four years he will be doing my voting for me. (Unless I come in ahead.) I then and there 'occupied the time' by giving those boys and girls a lesson in civil government, exactly such as I have many a time given in school. They seemed greatly interested, and when I took from my drawer some Washington views, and after giving them a glimpse promised to pass them around the next Sunday they said they would be there—and they were. Did you ever hear the Reverend Charles Stelzle talk?" she broke off to ask?

"Never."

"That is your loss. I heard him at Bay View. He says that when a preacher talks about the conflicts of the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Jebusites it is a sacred subject, but when he ventures upon the labour troubles of the Chicagoites and the Milwaukeeites his people shake their heads and say, 'That is too secular for the pulpit.'

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"I remembered that and I gave those boys a dissertation on the function of the Washingtonites and the 'Jeff-City'-ites that was illuminating if it wasn't sacred. And, Mr. Gilmer," she said, lapsing into seriousness, "the closer I get to the real things of life—and I've come pretty close to them these last few months—the more do I believe that the line of demarcation between secular and sacred things is like the equator, an imaginary line encircling—the universe."

He nodded gravely.

"The next Sunday I gave them an illustrated talk on the same subject, and on the third—well, if I had been a man I suppose you would have said that I preached them a sermon from the text, 'Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people.' At the close of the lesson I had them stand and sing 'America.' Every Sunday I have them sing it. I am very particular about what they sing. One day I found Bess selecting the hymn,

> 'Oh, to be nothing, nothing!
> Only to lie at His feet,
> A broken and empty vessel,
> For the Master's use made meet.'

'Bess,' I said, 'don't ever give these boys and girls such a sentiment as that! In the first place, it is a senseless thing. How can a broken vessel be fit for anybody's use? And besides that, to teach these people to 'be nothing' and to 'lie down' is criminal. Have them sing 'Stand

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up, stand up'—for *anything* so long as it makes for righteousness in the community or the nation!'"

He laughed aloud—a rare thing. He was finding the earnestness of this young lady immensely entertaining.

"When do you tackle the tariff?" he asked in all gravity.

"Now you are making fun of me."

"No," he said, "I am taking off my hat to you," suiting the action to the word. "I have lived in this community twenty-two years, Miss Dinwoody, and I have not made the impress upon it that you have in two months."

"That is because you do not see the needs of these people as I do through their children."

"I can hardly excuse myself that way. I am well aware that most of the people around here are as blind to the world outside of their own particular woods as was old Granny Dunham."

"Granny Dunham! What do you know about her?" She spoke eagerly.

"All there is to know. She had cataracts on her eyes and I operated upon them—successfully. That is all there is to it.

"Is it possible that you are the 'Wizard of the Ozarks'?" she demanded in amazement.

"That is one of my names, I believe. Another is——"

"Mr. Gilmer, *please* don't! I want you to forget that."

"I will, then. I've entirely forgiven it. But what do you know about Granny Dunham?"

"Eczema told me how the wizard had taken her off to

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the woods and stuck things into her eyes and blindfolded her, etc., etc. But I didn't dream it was you. Tell me about it."

"There isn't much to tell. She was a forlorn old woman, living with her son back here in the hills years ago and totally blind. I happened to be over there one day to see the man about something I wanted done and I saw this old woman sitting there. As soon as I looked at her sightless eyes I discovered that she had cataracts and that the time was ripe for an operation. I persuaded her to let me operate on them and——"

"Why, how did you dare?"

"Oh, the eye was my specialty. I was in practice then, fresh from the hospital."

"You *are* a surgeon then? I knew you were."

"I started out to be. But I lost out on it."

There was a tinge of bitterness in his curt words.

"Well, I knew she could not have proper attention there, so I took her over to my house and had Aunt Ailsy care for her after the operation until she was ready to go home. She never knew just where she was, for she was blind when she went to my house and I did not finally remove the bandage until I got her home. When she found she could really see she declared I was a wizard. I let it go at that, not caring to be bothered as I knew I should be if they thought I was a doctor."

"And you have never practised here?"

"No."

"How did they get the story of your taking off little

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boys with crooked knees?" She was sure now that this too was a part of the wizard myth.

"You have heard that too, have you? Well, I did take off one little boy with a crooked knee—to the Children's Hospital in St. Louis. He was a little fellow with a malformation that I heard about 'way off in the woods. I was convinced when I saw it that he could be cured, and I took him to St. Louis for treatment. When I returned him whole my fame as a wizard grew, I believe. I took care to keep my identity concealed, for the reason I have given. But this was years ago—long enough for it to have become a legend now."

"And the rest of it. Where do you bury their crooked knees? This is intensely interesting."

"What?" He wore a puzzled face. "Where do I bury——"

"Their crooked knees. That's what they say you do. They insist upon it."

"Well, I give that up. Clearly that is manufactured out of whole cloth."

But it was evident he had not entirely given it up for he remained in deep thought, repeating occasionally, "their crooked knees—bury their crooked knees." After a time a light broke upon him. "By George! I believe I have it!"

"What is it?" she cried.

"Do you know anything about ginseng?"

"Not a thing. I never heard of it."

"Well, ginseng is a plant that is valuable for its root,

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which grows in most fantastic forms and is believed by the Chinese to have wonderful medicinal properties. It is exported to China in considerable quantities. It grows wild but it can also be cultivated. I have raised it for years. It is a profitable crop and is more easily marketed than a more bulky one. That is why I took it up years ago when I came to this country. It is raised quite extensively in some sections but not much around here.

"There has always been a feeling, I think, among the ignorant that there is something uncanny about ginseng. You would understand that feeling better if you should see it. I'll bring you over some sometime." She thanked him with a smile. "It grows in fantastic shapes, not very unlike the knee, since you speak of it."

"And that's what the crooked knee legend comes from, you think?"

"I imagine so. I can think of nothing else. Some of these roots grow in shapes curiously resembling a man. Those have a special pecuniary value."

"How curious! I wonder why."

"They are imagined to have special medicinal virtue, I believe. There are all sorts of legends about ginseng. There is a common tradition in Korea, where it grows quite abundantly, that when it is taken from the earth it utters a low musical cry like the wail of a lost spirit—if that is supposed to be musical—and it must be quickly wrapped up or its virtue will depart, to return no more."

"Have you ever heard it?"

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"Never. It talks nothing but money to me—money and work. Then the Koreans say that only persons of blameless life and purity of heart can so much as see where the young ginseng shoots upward its few stalks covered with pale leaves."

"Do you believe that?"

"No. I have disproved it, for I am very successful in finding it in the forests."

"I thought you cultivated it."

"I do now. I got my first roots from the hills, though."

"If it is so profitable, why doesn't everybody raise ginseng? Perhaps I'll try it myself."

"It takes more patience than most people have. Five to seven years are required to obtain marketable roots from the seed—rather less, if you start with roots. You see corn is quicker, and even grapes."

"Yes, I think I will hardly embark on ginseng. It would mean from five to seven different kinds of starvation for me. But how did you happen to have so much patience?"

"I've had long practice in waiting," he said, with a curious narrowing of the eyelids and a straightening of the lips. "I've learned the secret of biding my time." Then with a swift but hardly perceptible change of tone, "Have you had enough air now or shall we ride farther?"

That night Eleanor found herself going over and over the incidents of the drive. What a strange man he was!

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And yet how interesting! She tried to imagine the lattice-covered arbours under which his plants were reared. He had told her about that going home. Then the story of Granny Dunham came again to her mind. . . . And why should a man who could perform a surgical operation on the eye be roaming the hills for ginseng? "Well," she thought, "he certainly has been a comfort to me in this time of trial, whatever he is. And he is gentleness itself to Juddie. I have such a feeling of reliance on his strength."

As she was sinking into slumber another thought roused her: What was it he had been waiting for all these years?

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XVII

THE BABY'S BURIAL

THE VINEYARD, Nov. ——

DEAR MADGE:—I have so much to tell you. And yet I do not feel in a mood for writing to-night except about one thing. No, it isn't Juddie, thank Heaven! Juddie is doing finely and I am back in school. His arm will be in a sling for a while longer as a precautionary measure, but he is coming out splendidly, thanks to Mr. Burton Gilmer. What he has been to us nobody but ourselves will ever know. As an old lady I once knew used to say of her lawyer, "I shall always love that man—*in a business way!*"

And to tell you the truth, Madge, I have found his companionship very timely as well as his medical services, for the social side of me is just about atrophied. Bess has Neil for a chum—a perfectly frank and natural friendship it is too, with no nonsense—but with Willis Rand touring the Ozarks I have to fall back upon work for mental stimulus. Now I never deprecate work. I consider it our best friend. But it does not satisfy our social instincts. So I am glad now and then of a few minutes' intercourse with Dr. (?) Gilmer.

Speaking of Neil—we are going to start soon on a

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course of reading for the winter evenings. I want Bess to have some systematic study even if she is out of school, and learning that she was to take this up, Neil asked if he would join us. I can see no reason why he shouldn't —it would give Bess the stimulus of a class—so we agreed. I really anticipate a good deal of pleasure in it myself, and they are quite enthusiastic.

However, it is not of youthful plans and hopes that I want to write to-night, but of the blighting of them.

Madge, do you remember the consumptive and his wife that I wrote you about—the woman who lived in a tent and was so homesick? The one bright spot in her gloomy outlook was the baby, a dear little thing just beginning to prattle in the sweetest way. She was so proud of it and loved it so. The frayed remnants of her life were wrapped about that child! Well, *the other day it died!* It seems to me too unspeakably hard that it should be torn from her. But it was. Death is as unfeeling and relentless as one of these rock-ribbed cliffs!

It was ill only a day and night. She sent for me as I had told her to do and I was with them most of the time. I was so glad I had been to see her. That call with Mr. Rand opened the way for me to be of service to her when she needed me. They had no physician and no way of sending for one. That is the tragedy of the wilderness. There is ample time to die before you can get help.

Of course I thought the first thing of Burton Gilmer and proposed that they should let me go for him. I went

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over just before night, but he was not at home; nor was anybody else. We did what we could for the poor little thing but by eleven o'clock she was so choked up that I made up my mind I should try Mr. Gilmer again. Mr. Padgett did not know where he lived and then he was in no condition to go anyway, nor she to be left.

I told them I was not at all afraid (which was as far from the truth as I often get), took a lantern, and started off. Well, if you can think of a spookier thing than a midnight walk through an Ozark forest on an inky night your imagination is very vivid. My heart was in my mouth from the moment I started, but with that little thing gasping for breath in the tent I felt that I would go through flood and fire to reach Burton Gilmer. The first time I heard a hoot-owl I nearly dropped my lantern. I suppose if I had done that and the light had gone out, I should have died!

I kept straight on, though; I will do myself the justice to say that I never once thought of turning back, but I went forward as men go into battle, I suppose—not from courage but from necessity. Once at the right I heard a stealthy movement in the brush. I knew it was a man; and all the stories of felonious assaults I had ever read of rushed over me. I raised my lantern with the distinct thought, I remember, that when the man came I should strike him full in the face with it. Just at that tense moment there came from the brush a familiar grunt. Oh, Madge, I could have embraced that animal from sheer relief! I had forgotten that hogs run wild here.

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Then a whippoorwill struck up, and that seemed like the voice of a friend. They come so close to you down here that it seems as if they were talking right in your face. The whippoorwill calmed me down quite a bit, so that I made good speed while he was with me, but he gave me up after a while and I stumbled on alone again. Then without warning somebody slapped me in the face. They told me afterwards that it was a bat—but I don't know. Well,—*just before I died* I reached Burton Gilmer's house. I didn't know whether the dogs were out or not, and by that time I didn't much care. If I were torn to pieces by them, it would at any rate be by something I was acquainted with!

But the dogs were inside. I heard them growl as I knocked. Mr. Gilmer came down instantly. Of course he would go. But the buggy was out of commission, and time was an object. Would I be willing to ride behind him? I certainly would. When I got on that horse, holding tight to a human being I felt like a frightened child in the arms of its mother!

When we got to the tent we went to work in earnest. I think it was a comfort to them to have him there and he was able to ease the passing, but that was all. He couldn't save her. We fought for her side by side all night, but the little life flickered out with the stars.

Madge, I have never seen anything so awful as that mother's dry-eyed grief. It seemed as if she were turned to stone. Mr. Gilmer got Mrs. Sutton to come over and stay with her while I went with the father and him

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to select a burial place. He had told me before he went away that he would give land for a burying ground and he should like to have me help select it. You see the Padgetts didn't even own the ground their tent was on.

We found him there when we reached the place designated, and we three decided upon the place for the little grave. It was on a sunny hillside overlooking the mountains on the east and had a background of deep dark forest. A beautiful spot, but oh, so lonely!

Mr. Gilmer took us home in his buggy. We had left word the night before for Neil to put it in order the first thing in the morning, knowing it would be needed. He talked with Mr. Padgett in a low tone after they reached the tent. I heard him say, "I will speak to the carpenter and will send him over with it. You will allow me to do this much—as a neighbour?"

It made my heart come into my throat to hear him say that. He had been so determined not to be known as a neighbour.

"Of course," he said as we went on after leaving Mr. Padgett at the tent, "the coffin will be crude. That can't be helped." It put a thought into my mind. I asked him to send Mr. Honn over to see me at The Vineyard.

When he left me at home I went right upstairs and dived down into my trunk and got out that white cloth dress I bought at Field's three years ago. You remember it? It was still pretty good and really I suppose, in the present state of our finances, I ought not to have done

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it, but it seemed to me I could not let that little thing be laid away in an uncovered pine coffin. When Mr. Honn came I had it ready, with some soft muslin stuff for linings and asked him if it would do to cover the casket with. "Why, sure!" he said, "and, Miss Dinwoody,"—there were actually tears in the man's eyes—"this work ain't a-goin' to cost anybody anything, not even Mr. Gilmer, though he wants to pay."

There is one blessed thing about being in a primitive neighbourhood. It brings people very close together in homely service. In the city we can only send flowers—and flowers—and more flowers.

I had a hope that the sight of the little white casket might break up the mother's stony, unnatural condition of mind, but it was not so. The father was deeply moved, but when she saw it she said only, "I'm glad she won't have to be laid away in a pine box." And she was still dry-eyed.

When the time for the burial came, Mr. Burson—big-hearted Mr. Burson—seated the parents in the back of his spring wagon and put the little casket across their laps. Their arms were around the baby for the last time. The rest of us followed.

Madge, did you ever see a burial without a prayer? I hope I may never witness another. If I live a hundred years I shall never forget that scene—the lonely little grave on the hillside with the solemn sighing forest beyond; and at its brink the smitten parents, and ourselves—a handful of shepherdless sheep—gathered about them.

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Mr. Burson and the carpenter rested the little white coffin on pieces of wood across the grave and then stood with uncovered heads. The silence was appalling. It seemed to me I could not breathe.

Mr. Burson began to fidget with the reins he had taken off to lower the coffin with. Then the mother whispered something to the father and he asked:

"Is there any one that can offer a prayer?"

Not a person stirred. Our lips were palsied. I looked at Mr. Burson imploringly. He shook his head. At Mr. Honn. He turned away. At Mr. Gilmer. His eyes were on the ground. Madge, it was frightful!

Then the mother's voice was heard, low but hard and bitter,

"Nobody in this God-forsaken place that can say a prayer over a dead baby!"

I felt a tug at my dress. It was Juddie. I had brought him with me because there was no one to leave him with, Eczema being inconsolable at the thought of missing the "burryin'" as she called it.

"Aunt Nell," he whispered. "I know a prayer."

"Say it!" I told him, for I was perfectly desperate.

And the next thing we heard was his sweet childish treble smiting the stillness, slowly and solemnly:

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to take.
And this I ask for Jesus' sake.
Amen."

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At the first words a change came over the face of that stricken mother. Convulsive sobs shook her frame, and the sealed fountains of her grief were broken up.

"It is baby's prayer!" she sobbed. "Baby's prayer!" Then, casting herself down on the ground beside the little casket and the open grave, she raised her clasped hands and streaming eyes to heaven, repeating brokenly in an agony of supplication:

> "Now I lay her—down to sleep.
> I pray Thee,—*Lord,*—her soul—to keep—
> . . . . . .
> I *pray* Thee,—Lord,—her soul to keep—
> Her soul—to keep—" . . .

Her voice sank to a whisper.

> . . . . "—her soul—to keep."

We lifted her gently up and she said quietly, "Go on, I can bear it now."

I can't write any more to-night, Madge. I am all broken up over what we've been through. Oh, how I wished for Willis Rand! He would have known just what to do. It is so long between his times of coming.

Faithfully,

NELL.

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XVIII

"SWEET LAND OF LIBERTY"

THE hands of the clock on Miss Dinwoody's desk pointed to 3:35, and the advanced reading class was just ready to come forward. The teacher at the board was putting on seat work for the classes at their desks, and was hurrying a little, for the reading lesson was on "Our Land" and she wanted full time for it.

Outside could be heard the occasional tinkle of a cow-bell and the movements of a small roaming herd intent upon getting all the educational advantages of the school grounds at least; within was the usual hum of a school which had not yet reached the point of using its brains unassisted by its lips. Upon this hum a silence suddenly fell, and turning quickly Miss Dinwoody saw in the open doorway a squat, thick-set man, a German by his features, surveying the school. She knew him by instinct.

"How do you do, Mr. Schlitz? Won't you come in? It *is* Mr. Schlitz, isn't it?"

"It iss." He pronounced the words ominously and with emphasis, as he came forward to take the chair she offered.

"I am glad to have you visit my school," she began with pacific intent. But he interrupted.

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"I haf not come to visit—no! I haf come to haf a few vordts—*yoost a few*—about dot boy of mine." He paused long enough to have her take in the significance of this and prepare to strike her colours. "*T'ree times,*" he went on, nodding his head and tapping on the table with his forefinger to emphasize the point, "*T'ree times already* haf I sent you vordt dot you vas to put Otto mit de big boys. Iss he dere yet? No. Now I ask you vhy?"

"Because he is not able to do the work of the class. It would be a great detriment—a great harm—to him to permit it."

"I take dot risk." It was firmly said and with an air of finality.

"But I cannot."

"You!—you!——" he said with fine scorn. "He iss your child?"

"No. But he is my pupil. You can take your own share of responsibility but you cannot relieve me of mine. And I cannot conscientiously advance the boy."

"You *cannot?* You mean you *vill not,* hey?"

She perceived that the conflict was unavoidable. It remained only to make it as brief and bloodless as possible.

"That is exactly what I mean." The man was white with anger. "Now, Mr. Schlitz, if you will excuse me I will call my class. I have already written to you at length about this matter after your talk with my niece. I

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shall be glad to give you all the time you want to talk it over—but it must be after school."

"No!" he said, bringing his fist down upon the table with a force that made it shake. "It vill be *now!* It vill—be *settled*—now!"

"So far as I am concerned," she said quietly, "it is already settled."

"Not yet!"—he shook a menacing head—"I vill haf de law——"

"You don't understand our laws, Mr. Schlitz."

"I vill take dis to de *di*rectors."

"I have already done so. They sustain me."

"And you—you *ref*-use to do as I say?"

"I do."

It seemed unthinkable to him, but he rallied and made his last stand.

"Den I take my children—*efery von of dem*—from dis school!" It was a tentative threat that had been used successfully on many occasions. But it left her unmoved.

"That is your privilege. There is no compulsory law in this district. Otto, Fritz, Heinrich, Elsa," turning to the agitated progeny of Mr. Schlitz, "you may get your books and hats. Your father desires to take you home. They will be ready in a moment, Mr. Schlitz."

The irate German was plainly disconcerted. It was not acquiescence but argument that he expected, and final surrender. But he returned gallantly to the charge.

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"I do not like your schools," he said. "And I do not like your country. It iss *not* de landt of de free. Here mann must all time do vhat somebody else please!"

His animadversions on the school system might have been passed over, but when any man inveighed against Miss Dinwoody's country in the presence of her school he did it at his own risk.

"I suppose," she said distinctly but in a tone so quiet that the import of the words was lost upon the school, "the same vessel that brought you over would take you back?" There was a note of interrogation in this, and suggestion, which he did not answer.

"I can't find my hat," at this juncture sniffed Otto, loath to go.

"I think you can if you try."

The father instantly took it up. "He tell you he cannot find it. Will you send a child home mitoudt his hat?"

"He will find it." There being no wardrobe the hats were hung on hooks in plain sight.

"But he tell you he cannot do so!"—very violently.

"I will show him that he can. Be seated, Otto. Boys, pass to the back and get your hats." When they had done so the missing chapeau stood out in bold relief. "Now, Otto, you may get your hat. Good-bye, children. Come to the Christmas tree. Good-afternoon, Mr. Schlitz."

He went away speechless with rage at being outwitted, but with no cause for action, nor hope of rein-

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statement except by the humiliating route of personal petition. Then the hats were restored to their places, the reading class was called, and " Our Land " and its freedom gave a seasonable opportunity for a clear-cut exposition of " liberty " and " license," and the distinction between them.

School was dismissed, the children gone; and still Eleanor Dinwoody lingered, putting the table to rights, picking dead leaves from the plants in the window boxes, and busying herself about so many immaterial things that any disinterested observer would have said she was killing time while waiting for some one. And this was precisely what she was doing. She was half expecting—and only half—a call from Burton Gilmer, and the feeling with which she contemplated it was more trepidation than pleasurable anticipation. It was at Neil's request that the interview had been undertaken.

The course of study so hopefully arranged to beguile the winter evenings at The Vineyard had met with a decided check. This came in the form of unlooked-for opposition on the part of Burton Gilmer. When Neil, confident of the cordial concurrence that had always been accorded him in his underakings, laid this beautiful plan before his uncle he was chagrined and disappointed that it met with no sympathy. More than this, there was distinct disapproval, and finally as nearly a veto as one man may lay upon the movements of another. It was the first serious disagreement that had ever arisen between the two, and it was a deep grief to the boy.

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"But I won't stand for it," he said firmly to Eleanor, to whom he immediately communicated his uncle's position. "I am a man, as he is, and he can't tell me what I must and must not do. He forgets that I am no longer a child."

"We all do that, Neil," she returned with soothing intent, "with those of our own family. Don't you know it is the most difficult thing in the world for parents to realize that their children ever grow up? and you are his child, virtually."

"I know it, and that is what makes it so hard to oppose him now. But I *shall* oppose him! He has no right to put any such arbitrary restriction upon me."

"What reason does he give for his opposition?"

"None whatever. He simply says he does not wish me to do it, and apparently he expects that to settle it. If he would give me a reason—a fair one—it would be different. I don't understand it at all. Uncle has never been unreasonable with me before."

"Do you think it can be that he dislikes us?" wondered Eleanor, "or is a little resentful at your being over here so much?"

"Oh, I think not. He has never intimated such a thing, nor ever put an obstacle in the way of my coming. I don't know what it is unless he has some notion that the study of literature tends to make a man effeminate."

She looked up at the big fellow with a smile of unconcealed amusement. "Why, Neil, you could never be made effeminate now. It is too late."

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He hardly noticed the pleasantry.

"I don't think he has ever liked women," going back to her former suggestion. "*Why,* I don't know. I am sure I do," laughing and blushing like a girl. "Now don't understand that he has ever said a word against you or Bess"—(in his preoccupation it was "Bess"—without title or prefix)—"but before you came, all my life it seems to me, as I think back upon it, he has led me—whether intentionally or not I don't know—to think poorly of women. Not that he has ever said much, either, but——"

The break was sufficiently significant.

"No, I am not going to give up this," he went on. "Uncle has made his life—just what he wants it, I suppose, and I shall claim the right to make mine. . . . But I hate to be at variance with him. He has always been so good to me. You don't know how it hurts me to go contrary to his wishes. I shall do it, though. I am not going to be dictated to in any such way. If he would only give me a reason——"

So thoroughly did she sympathize with him that she would not trust herself to reply.

"Miss Nell, I wish you would talk to him about it. You can always make people see things."

"But, Neil, I am a woman, and you say——"

"I am sure uncle likes *you,*" he said.

It ended in her sending a note to Mr. Gilmer asking him to call at the schoolhouse any day about four or half-past that he might be passing, to see her on a matter of

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business. It was about that time now, and she was wondering if he would come, and what she would say to him if he did. What right had she to say anything? It seemed hardly delicate.

It was with this thought in her mind and a thumping heart in her breast that she answered the knock at the door. She opened it not to Mr. Gilmer but to Willis Rand, and the feeling of relief doubtless threw an augmented cordiality into her greeting. They fell at once into the easy comradeship that had always characterized their intercourse.

"Is it possible this is the schoolhouse in which I preached once on a time?" he asked, looking critically at the burnished stove, the shining lamp chimneys, the windows with their neat shades and luxuriant window boxes of scarlet geraniums and training vinca vines. "Where did you get your flowers? They look a little exotic for this setting."

"Neil Gilmer sent off for them. He had heard me longing for a touch of colour in all this green (you see the boys filled the fern boxes) and he and Bess planned a surprise for me. Aren't they pretty? This makes a permanent church decoration. Yes, the boys made the boxes and Mr. Honn gave the paint as his contribution. You can't imagine how Mr. Honn has improved. He and I have become quite intimate. He made those book shelves for our library and he gave the boys a valuable lesson or two about the construction of window boxes."

"From what does this transformation date?"

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"I trace it back to the time I set him right on the postmastership. I must tell you about that. You know how ready he is to wet-blanket anything proposed—anything, no matter what. Well, I don't think much of neighbourhood Jeremiahs. The original may have served a good purpose—I don't know about that—but certainly his successors are not valuable in the constructive work of a community. And I don't mind admitting to you, Mr. Rand, that you were right about the necessity of *making* this neighbourhood. I am alive to it now if I wasn't then.

"You know it requires an effort to get anything started, and whatever I tried to do Mr. Honn thought best to discourage. And the worst of it was that from his position as country postmaster he had the ear of the community as I had not. I heard from time to time of his saying Miss Dinwoody thought she could make a pay school go, but she never could;—and that Sunday school—that would peter out in a little while;—and boys couldn't do anything at mending roads, it took men, etc. I got tired of it. And I decided to centre my missionary efforts on him.

"I had heard Mrs. Padgett say she hated to have her husband go for his mail because Mr. Honn had such a depressing effect upon him. I repeated the sentiment aloud several times so as to make sure of having heard some one else say it, and then I asked Neil how he liked Mr. Honn as a postmaster. 'I don't like him at all,' he said. 'He is a regular calamity howler. I wish they

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would put in Mr. Burson.' Bess echoed this and so did Tom, and I felt that I had by this time a good working capital.

"I went to Mr. Honn and told him frankly as a friend (that is what people always say when they start in on something disagreeable, I believe) that I had heard some intimations that he was not considered a suitable person for this office—and I told him plainly why. Also that I had heard the wish expressed that Mr. Burson might be given his place because he was more inspiriting. I didn't know that it was right, Mr. Rand, but it was certainly effective. You know how blessings brighten as they take their flight. Nothing ever written in prose or poetry shows better knowledge of human nature than that. The post-office as it seemed to be slipping from his grasp became a glittering jewel to Mr. Honn.

"Self-interest is a powerful spur to action. As a motive power with most of us it surpasses altruism. Mr. Honn appeared anxious to prove his suitability from that moment, and I have taken occasion several times to repeat to him complimentary things I have heard said of his improvement."

"You being the author, I suppose?"

"Sometimes. Sometimes others. Oh, his reform is noticeable. I want you to tell him you have heard it commented upon. I suppose it was a little Jesuitical, but I think the end justified the means."

He expressed no opinion on this subject but went over to the library.

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"Where did you get all these books?"

"Mainly by means of Madge Dixon's class and Eleanor Dinwoody's pen. I wrote fifteen letters and got as many packages of books—good juicy ones too—none of your Patent Office reports! It has helped my Sunday school immensely. These books are a drawing card with the large boys.

"Mr. Rand," she went on with enthusiasm, "it is wonderful how people respond. It seems sometimes as if they were just ready and waiting for some one to propose ways in which they can help. Now, there are our patterns. Bess concluded she would start a sewing school for the large girls. She has them Wednesday afternoons at The Vineyard. It is more convenient there and the girls like it. Besides, I have an idea that it is good for them to go once in a while into other homes than their own. This was to be strictly a garment class—no fancy work—and back in the woods they haven't yet heard the gospel of good patterns.

"I wrote to a well known pattern firm and stated our needs. Would they send us some? mentioning the kinds. In due time the patterns came; firm glad to have opportunity, etc. I really am coming to rely upon personal effort as some people rely on the efficacy of prayer. Some of these days I shall write to a seed firm to see if I can't get some flower seeds for a competition I propose starting in the spring."

He was regarding her with a look that was a mingling of amusement, wonder and admiration. "I read some-

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where the other day that the difference between the 'classes' of men is the presence or absence of initiative. I wonder if that isn't true of individuals."

"Perhaps you think I've been too——"

"No, I don't. I shouldn't like you to be different in any particular."

Something in his look made her turn away and say quickly, "Now give an account of yourself. What have *you* been doing?"

"Trading churches."

"Trading churches? What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. Since seeing you I have successfully 'pulled off,' if you will excuse the sportiness of the phrase, a bodily exchange of a Methodist and a Presbyterian church,—the M. E.'s giving up to us a feeble organization over at Pine Ridge where it happens there are a good many followers of the blue banner; and the Presbyterians renouncing all claim to a nearly defunct little church of their name down here in the next county where there are a good many Methodists. I had to wait for action by conference and synod. That is what detained me."

"And are these churches willing to be bandied about like shuttlecocks that way?" she demanded in astonishment.

"'All that a man hath will he give for his life.' They both knew they were at death's door and that this was all that could save them. One of them was so weak that it wanted to die."

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"What do you do about the church property?" Her practical mind at once adverted to this difficulty.

He laughed. "The Methodist church thought they ought to have two hundred and fifty dollars *boot* for their church and the Presbyterians wanted the same. So they agreed to 'break even.'"

Then after a silence which she did not break, for she saw that his thoughts were not on her, "Yes, in my opinion church comity is the only solution of this home mission problem in a country like this. The field should be divided up as in foreign lands. But there—I don't mean to bore you. How is your school progressing?"

"Finely. And I think I am going to work up an 'extra session' too. Several of the older boys tell me they want to come, and I am going to let them work out their tuition at The Vineyard next spring. . . . No, I don't think there will be any risk. They are honest. Mr. Rand, some of them are so funny! I must tell you of my egg deal.

"A day or two ago I was giving them work in rapid computation and I said, 'If I have ten dozen eggs and offer them at forty cents a dozen, how much will they bring me? Hands up.' Their brows were puzzled and they chewed their pencils, being forbidden to make other use of them. All but one boy. Apparently he knew the answer without computation. 'Well, James?' I said. 'They wouldn't bring you nothin',' he answered contemptuously, 'You couldn't sell aigs at no sich price.' I assured him you could in some places; that where I came

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from I paid that and sometimes more; and I asked him how much they were here. 'Fifteen cents,' he said. I leaned over toward him and whispered confidentially, 'Bring me two dozen.' And James beamed.

"They came the next morning and I had my thirty cents ready. 'How much, James?' I asked as a mere matter of form. 'Eighty cents.' 'Eighty cents!' I said. 'Why, you told me they were fifteen cents a dozen.' 'That's what we sell 'em fur to people what knows the price of aigs,' he said; 'but maw she 'lowed ef you-all paid forty 'twarn't no more'n right to let you have 'em at yo' own price.'"

They were in high glee over this experience when there was a darkening of the western light shining through the open doorway and Eleanor looked up to see Burton Gilmer standing there.

"Am I interrupting?"

She gave him a steady hand, though her heart beat a little faster than usual. "No, indeed. I've been telling Mr. Rand some of my school experiences."

"Has Mr. Gilmer heard that story?"

"No. I'll tell it to him some time." She felt that the lightness of the story would not accord with the evident gravity of his mood. The conversation went on haltingly, and Mr. Rand soon rose. She excused herself to Mr. Gilmer and followed him to the door.

"Would you like to take another ride over the hills to-morrow? I have to give out notices of the service Sunday, since I got here too late for your school."

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"Oh, yes!" There was no doubting her pleasure in this.

"Ten o'clock then, sharp."

"Lunch as before?"

"By all means. I never tasted anything so good."

"And a sycamore cup if we can find a leaf that isn't too dry! Good-by."

Coming to the silent man at the desk it all sounded very friendly and intimate—a part of the jolly good fellowship he had interrupted. He wondered if it were likely to be anything more.

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XIX

THE GUARDIANS CLASH

WHEN she came back to the seat beside him he was looking at something she had written on the board high up on one side:

"I will work in my own sphere, nor wish it other than it is; this alone is health and happiness; this alone is Life."

"I put it there the first day of school, after the children were gone," she explained. "It had been a hard day and I was a little blue. I needed a trumpet call like this to rally my forces. Of course you know who said it."

"Yes,—Longfellow."

"And the circumstances?"

"I think not."

"It was written when he was gathering up the fragments of his life that had been shattered at a blow, in one tragic moment. There seems to me something admirably heroic in a man that can make a life in spite of fate. It rouses me to courage whenever I look at it."

He made no comment upon this but turned to the other side and read aloud:

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"Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it."

"Where did you get that?"

"From an old book my mother used to love."

There was a softening of his stern mouth.

"The same old book, I imagine, that *my* mother loved. Why did you put that there?"

"Because once—I withheld good from him to whom it was due——" she stopped; it was of her brother and his time of need she was thinking. The look in his face impelled her to finish,—"and afterwards—it was in the power of my hand no longer. . . . But why do the words hold you?"

"For the same reason," he said without smiling, and his voice was strangely solemn. "I too withheld good when it was in the power of mine hand to do it. . . . When I was ready—she was gone."

It was the nearest to a personal disclosure he had ever come. She had the thrilling sense of being on the threshold of a confidence. But it went no farther. Even as she waited he was back in the commonplace present—a conventional smile on his lips.

"I met Mr. Schlitz and his family as I came over. I judged from their appearance that something was doing."

She told him the story circumstantially.

"I thought you were a member of the 'Helping Hand' society," he mocked.

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She had told him laughingly once that she intended to organize a club of that name with Mr. Burson and Neil as charter members.

"I am. And I have extended Mr. Schlitz exactly the kind of help he needed."

"If he gives you any more trouble," he said gravely and with meaning, "you let me know, and I will administer some additional assistance,—from the outside,—the *bully!*"

It warmed her heart to its very depths to feel that he was ready to take up her cause and fight for her. For the moment there was upon her the feeling of blessed security she had felt that night when she had clung to him and galloped through the darkness to the dying child. Surely this was proof that his opposition to her plans was not personal.

But this emotion, like that of a moment ago, was evanescent. His next words brought the chilling reaction.

"You wanted to see me?"

She had asked to see him, certainly, but now that the opportunity had come she suddenly realized that she had nothing to say. What was there to say to a man who objected to one of his family coming into close relations with those of her family, and gave no reason for it? Should she demand an explanation? Could she insist upon a withdrawal of his opposition? What she had planned so guilelessly to do seemed suddenly indefensible. The personal side of the question predominated now—rose up before her in monster proportions. Could

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she insist upon a young man's being permitted to visit her house? . . . But she must say something! With this silent waiting figure before her she *must* say something. She plunged in desperately.

"Mr. Gilmer, I have sent for you because I wish to explain my position in this unfortunate affair that is troubling Neil so much." In saying this there was an unconscious and wholly unpremeditated change of front. She had really sent for him in order to plead Neil's cause; confronting him, with his searching black eyes looking into hers it almost seemed as if she herself was the one that needed advocacy. She wanted to justify herself in his eyes; to assure him that she had no designs on his nephew; no intention of coming between them.

"Mr. Gilmer, I should never have consented to Neil's coming into this class if I had dreamed that you would disapprove. I do not in the least understand why you do —it seems to me a perfectly innocent and natural pleasure for him—for us all, in fact, for I expect to enjoy it as much as they do; and I hope it will be a benefit. But I do want you to know that I had no idea of running counter to your wishes nor of making dissension between you and Neil. Nothing was farther from my thoughts."

"I have never for one moment thought that." What he had thought he did not say, though she gave him opportunity.

"In fact," she went on, "I did not extend an invitation at all. Neil heard what we were planning to do and asked if he couldn't come. I could not well refuse."

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"It might have been far better if you had," he said with a bitterness she could not understand.

"But why? There was no reason why I should. Do you know of any?"

He was silent.

"Do you?" she persisted.

"None, perhaps, from your point of view; but from mine—yes."

"I wish you would give me your point of view. I will try to make it mine. It is your refusal to give any reason for your opposition, Mr. Gilmer, that makes it so maddening to Neil. And it isn't treating him fairly. He feels this way about it and so do I; and I think we have a right to feel so." She was speaking pretty hotly now.

"I don't know," he began coolly, "that I feel called upon to stand and deliver my reasons to either you or Neil, but——"

"Mr. Gilmer, I beg your pardon. I *have* no right to question you, except——"

"Yes?" he interrogated, for she had stopped short.

"—That I should like to know if this is a personal objection. I think I have a right to ask that."

"I can answer that question categorically. It is not."

"I am glad to know that," she said simply. "We have seen a great deal of Neil since we have been here. He was very kind to us at a time when we needed kindness; and when I found there was something I could do for him in the way of directing his studies I was more than glad to do it. And, Mr. Gilmer,"—she spoke with hesitancy

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now—" in doing this for him I thought—I hoped—well, I was trying to return, in a different way, of course, and in small measure, what you had done for my boy."

"You overrate that obligation," he told her.

"I couldn't overrate it," she said, quick tears starting to her eyes, "and I can never repay it."

He had been toying with a pencil on her desk. As she spoke he wrote something on a scrap of paper and handed it to her. With his eyes upon her she read:

"Received, from Eleanor Dinwoody, payment in full."
"BURTON GILMER."

"Some time," he said with an enigmatic smile, "I'll tell you what that means, but not to-day. . . . No, Miss Dinwoody," he went on hastily as if to save her a reply, "you don't owe me anything. You have paid—and overpaid. And as to the boy—well, I suppose the gold of Ophir wouldn't be to him what the companionship of your household has been. I have seen that from the first. I am coming to the conclusion that you can't outwit Nature. She gets in ahead every time. For twenty-one years I have kept that boy close to me and away from everybody else—everybody, I mean, that could be a moulding force in his life. Our companionship has been close and intimate—satisfying, I think, to both of us until——" he stopped. But in a minute he went on.

"I never even let him go to school, but taught him

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myself. And yet—I say it with some pride—in the best sense Neil is not uneducated,—though he has not studied the history of literature." He gave a short laugh. "You know I have had him from the first. His mother, my sister,"—he was speaking hesitatingly now, as one who picks his way with care—"was separated from—his father, and upon her death the child fell to my care. I have reared him according to my own ideas. I have with deliberate purpose endeavoured to keep him in ignorance of the world and its ways. When he wanted to go away to school I would not consent to it—at least until he was past the formative period. He has had one year at the Agricultural College."

Eleanor had been listening with slowly gathering wrath to this recital of what she felt to be the smothering of a life.

"And now when he tries to help himself you do what you can to thwart him!" she cried indignantly. "It is a wicked thing!"

He considered this and her dispassionately. "Perhaps. The boundaries between weakness and wickedness are but ill-defined. When it comes to results they are about the same. That the position I took was a weak one I will easily grant. The facts forbid that I should do otherwise. The wall I have been nearly two-and-twenty years in building has been thrown down in a day. . . . It is nobody's fault. It is only that you can't fight *successfully* against Nature. I am just finding it out, and—it's bewildering."

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It certainly was to her. She did not in the least comprehend what he meant; but what she did perceive with infinite relief was that her impetuous criticism of him—repented as soon as uttered—had been passed by like the pecking of a bird. He was thinking not of her but of Neil.

"But I have given it up," he said at last. "I am beaten, and fortunately I have sense enough left to know it. So you and Neil can go on with your plans. I'll tell him to-night that I withdraw my opposition. I may as well, I suppose," he added, grimly.

"I am very glad, Mr. Gilmer," she said. "Your attitude in the matter might not alter what Neil would do, but it will make a great difference in the way he feels. Even this temporary estrangement has been a grief to him."

"I know it has, and so it has been to me. The bond between Neil and myself is very close. It is a wrench to have it even strained. Had I foreseen how a foolish, fruitless controversy like this would prove a wedge to divide us, I should have been slow to enter upon it. But one gets into such a thing sometimes unawares. I did not realize how set his heart was on this, nor how powerless I would be to turn him. Ah, well!"

For a time neither spoke. Then he said, half reluctantly, "I know, Miss Dinwoody, that the stand I have taken must seem incomprehensible to you as well as to Neil, but I ask you to believe that in opposing this closer companionship I have been actuated only by a desire to

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do what is best for all concerned—your house as well as mine."

She bowed without speaking. In her heart she was saying, "It was jealousy, pure and simple."

"And," he spoke slowly now as if impelled against his will to say more, "if the time should ever come when you regret this step—I beg you will remember—that I tried to prevent it."

"Why, Mr. Gilmer," she exclaimed with some impatience, "that is perfectly ridiculous! Why should I ever regret it? It can bring us nothing but satisfaction all around. Neil is a dear boy!"

"Yes," he said, but it was slowly and as if but half convinced, "he is—a dear boy."

The conversation being at an end, he rose. "I have my buggy. Will you ride home?"

On the way they talked of indifferent things,—Juddie's arm, the Padgetts, and a new plan she had for the cemetery. As he was starting away he put out his hand.

"Are we still friends—in spite of my sins?" It was the first reference he had made to her sweeping censure.

"Yes," she said, glad to have their old relations restored, "but it *was* wicked!"

He smiled, touched his hat, and was gone.

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XX

THE COUNTRY CLUB

THE VINEYARD, Nov. ——

DEAR MADGE:—I know I have neglected you. I am not writing as often as I did when I was looking after the loaves and fishes, but the explanation is that the loaves and fishes have brought me in so much work. With day school, Sunday school, sewing school, and night school (to say nothing of my library and a new project I shall herein detail) I am not likely to die of inanition in the Ozarks.

There is a pertinent saying to the effect that "the more you do, the more you *may* do"; but in these last months I have proved the truth of another, less exploited but more optimistic: namely, "The more you do, the more you *can* do." And I might add, "the more you want to do." When every hour is filled to the brim, and every faculty alert, when you can see things move and fairly hear them hum, it is astonishing how absorbing the game becomes. How do people ever find time to kill?

The night school goes merrily on despite Mr. Burton Gilmer's opposition. As I wrote you I was mightily pleased at the way that turned out, and I don't mind telling you privately that I was also a little relieved that

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it didn't result in a break between the guardians; for while I do not see much of Mr. Gilmer, and don't especially care to see more—at least, not much more—I should regret having to forego that little.

You see, the companionable men of my acquaintance down here are limited to B. Gilmer and Willis Rand. Of course I hardly count Neil, for he is just a boy—though a most lovable one. I thoroughly enjoy Mr. Rand, but he is gone so much on his peregrinations that it is rather pleasant to have one man left whose grammar I don't have to criticise. If you will come down to see me next summer I'll give you—well, I will let you guess which one of the two I *will* give you!

But it is not to speak of such a frivolous subject as men that I am writing this letter, but to tell of our achievements. What do you think, Madge,—we have a Country Club! Doesn't that sound up-to-date? Why, the next thing you know we will be having a *smart set!* You know I told you that some of the women had already qualified for that.

I am president of this Country Club—and secretary—and general manager. We don't need a treasurer. You may think me a little ambitious in essaying to fill all the offices, but there is so much said about the baneful effects upon the female character of office holding that I propose to test the matter. If I come out of three offices unscathed I think my sisters need not hesitate at one.

Our Country Club hasn't any golf links yet. You see, this isn't any old man's club, and the truth is that country

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boys and men have to lope around a course day by day that would make eighteen holes look like—well, if I ever used slang (which I don't) I should say—like *thirty* cents. And with winter coming on they don't need extra arm exercise either. The force and precision with which they strike an axe into a hickory log suffices. When it comes to "put-ting in," they do that at the woodshed.

No, our Country Club is organized for work, not play, and it is to tell you of one piece just completed that I am writing this.

I told you about the dear little baby and how we left it on the hillside. I never shall forget how I felt when I saw the men pile fence rails and brush on that little grave. You see, the stock roams at will through this country, and this was out in the open. Now, don't understand me that there are no cemeteries around here. There is one over at Shirley, but it is miles away and the mother did not want the baby taken so far off.

I thought of that little grave so many times afterwards. One day I spoke about it to Mr. Gilmer. He asked me a few days later if I would go with him over there, and I did. I found that he was planning to have Mr. Honn fence the place and he wanted to talk with somebody about where the fence should be placed and how much it should take in. It was a lovely spot, convenient to the road and with the most beautiful trees; but we could hardly get around for the underbrush. Mr. Gilmer looked at it rather ruefully and said it ought to be cleared,

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but he hadn't the time just then to do it. He had told me that he proposed to plat it and stake it off and then give it to the neighbourhood. Anybody could have a lot that wanted it.

A sudden thought came into my mind, which in view of what came of it I look upon as another inspiration. Everybody has inspirations, Madge,—at least everybody that really tries to do things. Did you know that? I suppose it is old to you, but I am just finding it out—probably because I have never tried until lately to do things.

I proposed to Mr. Gilmer to do the clearing myself and asked if he would trust it to me. I think he considered me mildly insane until I explained that I wanted it for my boys to do. I saw he hadn't any faith in it, but he finally agreed to leave it in my hands for a trial.

Well, I kept the large boys after Sunday school was dismissed the next week, told them what Mr. Gilmer had done and intended doing and proposed that we should go over there the next Saturday and clear up the place. Of course you know how it turned out. There's a reservoir of surplus energy stored up in big boys just waiting for a chance to be used. All it needs is for somebody to give it direction.

On Saturday we gathered on the hillside, the boys with axes, picks, and grubbing hoes, and I with a large lunch basket to which Mrs. Honn and Mrs. Burson had contributed liberally. They said they were glad to have a part in this. It was a joy to see those boys swing the

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axes. You know they were on their native heath clearing land, and I couldn't restrain my admiration—and didn't try. When they were through you wouldn't have known the place.

I had got one of the Sutton boys to bring a little good sod, and while the others chopped he and I sodded the little grave. I suppose it would have been better forestry to have left the underbrush to dry, but they wanted to make a clean sweep, and so did I. They made light work of drawing it off out of sight and when they went away their work had been well done. I think they were proud of themselves and I know I was proud of them. There were two young men working that day that did not belong to my class. They had heard that Mr. Gilmer intended giving the ground for a public burying ground and they wished to help. That is the way public spirit grows, isn't it? One of them, young Foree, told me that "ef Burton Gilmer was a-doin' anything fer the neighbourhood, he 'lowed 'twas time the rest of 'em was stirrin' theirselves." I shall tell Mr. Gilmer that. It is a doubtful compliment, but it may do him good.

When they were gone I went over to the tent where the Padgetts lived and told Mrs. Padgett I wanted her to go over to the baby's grave. She said she had been once, but she could not get to it for the rails and brush, and she had never been again. I had to tell her then that we had been doing some work there and I wanted her to see it. I never saw a woman so broken down as she was when we went through the gate and she saw that

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little sodded mound. She threw her arms over it and cried and cried and cried. I didn't try to stop her. I knew they were the kind of tears that helped.

When we were sodding the little grave I had said to Tim Sutton that I was sorry we hadn't any flowers to put on it, but of course we couldn't have because they were all gone. Then I told him how in the cities they lined the graves with evergreen and covered the earth with flowers and laid beautiful blossoms on the grave when it was rounded up and sodded. I didn't know I was making the slightest impression upon him but when I got back there with the mother what do you suppose was on that grave? A little bunch of bittersweet. He had found it in the woods near by and put it there while I was gone. He told me in a shamefaced way when I spoke to him afterwards about it that "hit 'peared like a little country child ought to have some flowers too." Madge, Tim Sutton is the most troublesome boy I have in school. I wonder if I have established a bond of sympathy between us. I certainly shall have more patience with him than I've had.

I had a note from Mrs. Padgett the next morning at Sunday school, brought by the little Sutton girl. It said:

"I want to thank your boys for what they did yesterday. I know now that we are not entirely friendless. And, Miss Dinwoody, it makes me feel that I want to help too. My hands are very empty. Could I be of use in your Sunday school?"

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I read that letter to my boys and told them how much this had been to her—how lonely she had felt and how destitute of friends. Madge, those boys are ready to do anything now! The work they did and the way it was received seem to have welded us together. I am sure I have a stronger hold upon them than I had before. By the way, the two young men that helped us at the cemetery were in Sunday school the next morning and told me they thought they would join the class. Isn't it strange how doing one thing makes us want to do another?

I have talked since with Mrs. Padgett and she will take the primary class. Her husband is so pleased to have her become interested in *anything*. This will leave Bess free for the girls, and I can give my whole time to my "Country Club." The way that is growing I shall need it. And they are keen to *do* something. I am equally anxious to have them do something too, for I don't want to lose the impetus gained by one successful effort. I have shown them the power of co-operation by the simple device of co-operating—they see for themselves how much can be effected by a number working to one end—and having seen it and being full of youthful spirits and vim they are ready for something else. Mr. Burson tells me that anything approaching public spirit has been woefully lacking in this community. It might not be orthodox exactly, but I wonder if it wouldn't be real Christian Endeavour work to try to create public spirit.

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What do you think, Madge? You are better up in Christian things than I am.

I believe I will set them at those bad places in the road again. They made one effort, a feeble one, but they didn't know how, and the last state of those mud holes was worse than the first. If they only had somebody to direct them! But I don't know anything about road-mending if I did once belong to a "bridge club." Wasn't that funny? . . . Oh, say!—it has just occurred to me. Why couldn't I get this Mr. Duggins, the road-builder, to come over here and give us a talk and tell us how? . . . I'll think that out. Maybe we will have a lecture course before you know it—first number, "Road-Mending," by Mr. Beef-club Duggins. Fine!

Madge, I am getting to be so fond of these boys. They are so sturdy and reliable and they rejoice so in their strength. There is good material here if I can only work it up. But they do say the funniest things!

I asked a boy one day to loan me his knife, and he apologized for its dullness by saying that "he undertaken to harden it, and he het it in hot grease, and it taken all the metal out'n it." And when I was talking wood lore to another one he told me, "When a 'possum finds he's goin' to be ketched he jes' drops and *sulls.*" Madge, do you know what it is for anything to *sull?* I don't, and Webster doesn't. But it is expressive—to anybody that knows the ways of the wily 'possum.

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Later.

I have seen Mr. Beef-club Duggins, and we have arranged for a talk from him at our schoolhouse! Now what do you think of that? I asked Mr. Gilmer to drive me over there. Neil would have done it or I might have gone just with Tom, but I wanted to enlist Mr. Gilmer if possible.

Mr. Duggins was greatly pleased to hear what we were contemplating. (The thing had broadened in my mind on the way over and I told him we wanted to organize a Good Roads Association. It was a little ambitious perhaps—but——) Mr. Duggins said admiringly, "I knowed when you told me you belonged to a bridge club back yonder that you would stir up somethin'." I could see out of the back of my head that Burton Gilmer was laughing, but I tried to look modest and not too self-conscious, so as to keep my place in Mr. Duggins's esteem. And I think I did. But had he only known—"Oh, what a fall," etc. (I haven't my Shakespeare at hand, and can't complete that *verbatim* in the right tense.)

It was very funny to hear Mr. Duggins talk to Mr. Gilmer as though he was as deeply interested in this thing as I was. I sat back then and threw the burden of it upon him, and I imagine he could see that I was the one to laugh this time. Going home he told me that a Good Roads Association in the neighbourhood was a form of Christian Endeavour that even he would be eligible for and that I might count on his assistance. But

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he wouldn't have anything to do with the management of it.

Mr. Duggins suggested that Jim Foree would be a good person to put at the head of it, so I shall resign now in his favour as manager. In some things, Madge, we have to admit our inferiority to the more muscular sex, and road-building is one of them. But I haven't observed that we are lacking in ability to push, have you?

Faithfully,

NELL.

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XXI

A WINTER OF ACTIVITIES

THE weeks sped by, lengthening into months. To the glorious Indian summer succeeded gray skies and lowering clouds, with a frosty atmosphere that quickened the blood and admonished the provident that winter was near. When Saturday came the boys' axes rang in the wood-lot back of the vineyard.

On Thanksgiving Day the Dinwoodys, with Neil Gilmer and Willis Rand as their guests, sat down to the promised feast of wild turkey. There was a lack of cranberry accompaniments, but the vineyard had yielded up its sweet juices to Bess's skilful hand, and her jellies were a worthy substitute. Whatever else was lacking was made up in youthful appetites. The saddening thought of vacant chairs was in the minds of the two girls as they made their simple preparations, but purposely they did not speak much of this even to one another. As for Juddie and the boys—well, a child lives in the present, and youth forgets.

Burton Gilmer as well as Neil had been bidden to this feast of game, but he had courteously declined. He would have had Neil do the same had the matter been within his power of control, but the boy was past him now, and

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issued a second declaration of rights to which this time there was no remonstrance.

"I don't know why he would not come," Neil said to Eleanor when he told her of his uncle's decision, "nor why he tried to keep me from coming,—but I know he did." There were no secrets now between these two on the subject of this strange obsession,—for obsession it certainly seemed.

"Doesn't he appear the same to you in other ways?" he asked.

"Entirely. Of course I don't know him as you do."

"He seems exactly as he has always done except about this. I can't understand it."

Eleanor thought she could, but she refrained from saying so. The thought of the silent man sitting in his lonely house bereft came to her many times that day. He had been superseded and he could not accept it. Somehow, her heart ached for him and she felt that they were half guilty, though her reason told her they were in no way to blame. It marred the pleasure of her day to think of him.

By the calendar a gulf of four long weeks divides Christmas from Thanksgiving Day; in actual fact, as everybody knows, it is but a hand's-breadth of time—a watch in the night, not when it is past but when it is passing. Limestone Ridge was to have such a Christmas as it had never seen, for the Reciprocity Bureau, with headquarters at Chicago, had sent out a box of wonderful things for young and old, to be hung in due

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time on the tree that the boys were to bring in from the hills. With it had come a letter telling of the satisfaction and enthusiasm with which the city children had made ready their gifts for the hill dwellers; of the tiny letters hidden in books, tied to the gay wrappings of games, or carried in the hands of dainty doll messengers,—letters giving the names and addresses of the donors and thus permitting answer as from friend to friend.

This was what the two wise plotters had determined the fruit of this tree should be—not charity, but personal gifts from friends hitherto unknown, to be thought of and cherished in the years to come as living personalities—a link between the hills and the far-off city world. Of course all this took time and thought; but anything in this world that is worth while takes time—and thought.

Rumours of the Christmas tree brought increase of attendance at Sunday school. This mild form of graft exists always in the city,—why not in the hills? It even brought the youthful Schlitzes, whose father, having "atheostic" tendencies according to Mr. Burson, had thus far withheld them from the fold. Long ago they had returned to school, where Otto had slipped into his place unostentatiously and without chastening, except as it was administered by his companions' derision.

It may have been the ease with which their return was accomplished that emboldened Mr. Schlitz; perhaps only his inborn inclination to put in an oar; but on the day following their admittance to the Sunday school he presented himself again before Miss Dinwoody in belligerent

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mood. He would let his children go into the school, he agreed grudgingly, but he would not have them taught such things—such lies—as they had reported yesterday, etc., etc.

Eleanor made short shrift of his religious qualms.

"Mr. Schlitz," she said with unmistakable meaning, "it is entirely optional with you whether or not you send your children to my Sunday school; but if they come they will have exactly what I choose to give them. If you wish them taught your own belief—or unbelief—you must do it yourself at home."

The young Schlitzes continued to come. It was near Christmas and the renunciation would be too great; but Mr. Schlitz was heard to remark more than once that he would prove to Miss Dinwoody and the neighourhood the fallacy of her teaching when he had opportunity, hinting vaguely at the coming festivities as the selected time. "I don't care anything about what he says," Eleanor confided to Neil, "but naturally I don't want my Christmas exercises spoiled by Mr. Schlitz."

On Christmas eve the schoolhouse at Limestone Ridge was packed, the tree resplendent; the deliciously fragrant, resinous odor of the pine and the cedar filled all nostrils, and the audience was steeped in expectancy. To this festive scene had flocked the neighbourhood—from the grandsire to the babe in arms. But there was entertainment for all. The candy bags had been prepared in faith—a little falteringly toward the last but justified after all, for at the door of The Vineyard had been found three

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days before they were to be used two buckets of candy direct from the factory but bearing the legend, "From the ravens." They could only guess its source.

From her place near the front Eleanor had observed Mr. Schlitz as he entered, but in the exertion of finding seats for his young hopefuls she lost him. And having done so she failed to notice the man behind him. This man, a tall one, had looked the assemblage over as he stood in the back until his eye lighted upon the German. Then he had taken the seat immediately back of him.

The singing and the simple exercises telling the sweet old story that is ever new at Christmas time, of waiting shepherds and the Holy Child, were over; the lighting up and the distribution were just ahead, and expectation was at its height. Then Mr. Schlitz arose.

"I haf a few remarks I vish to make——" he began. He got no farther. An iron hand was on his arm.

"*Sit down!*" a voice said in his ear. And Mr. Schultz, after one look into the face confronting him, sat down.

With quick wit Eleanor threw the school choir into the breach, and in the sweet strains of "Holy Night" anything either enlightening or disquieting from Mr. Schlitz was lost.

Interest in what was known as Miss Dinwoody's "pay school" deepened as the end of the too short term drew near. Never had there been as many large boys in attendance as this winter. Eleanor was liked by them, and among the patrons at home there was a steadily rising

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appreciation of the fact that this was a different teacher from the kind they were accustomed to having. Assisted somewhat by Mr. Burson and Mr. Rand, they were coming to realize that they had done an unwise thing to shorten the term. It really was too bad, they began to say, that they had cut themselves off from the hundred dollars the State would have given them. If a body had any education he had to pay for it some way or other, etc.

But there was no help for it now. They had made their bed and must lie in it. At the closing exercises of the school, which brought a goodly number of the fathers and mothers together, their folly was deftly though mildly emphasized by the County Superintendent whom Miss Dinwoody had invited to address them—the second "lecture" of her course. They listened to his talk on "Educational Opportunities," with a growing perception that they had let one of theirs slip.

"Now, don't you take any of their children into your school without full pay," the superintendent warned her after they were gone. "Let them learn their lesson. They'll vote a longer term next time."

The extra term was to be but two months, since they had begun late. That would take them into the middle of March, a time when country lads must be at work. The little ones dropped out. Only those who had no time to lose could come to a "pay school," and they were mainly boys. Eleanor tilled her field assiduously that winter, giving them much of the history and geography of their country and the science of government,—remembering

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John Haley, the mail carrier, and the imminence of his vote.

"I wish we had a school flag," she said to Bess one day. "I want to keep the Stars and Stripes before them—and what it stands for. There is a firm I know that advertises them wonderfully cheap, but every school has to pay a part. Like Andrew Carnegie's benefactions they have a string tied to them. Do you suppose we could collect enough from the school for it?"

"I doubt it, but you might try."

"I think I shall. One of my working maxims is: You never can tell what you can do until you try. I put it on the board for them this way:

"You never can tell
What you can do
Until
you
try."

"We have demonstrated the truth of it down here," said Bess.

"Yes," returned Eleanor, absently, "I believe I will take up a collection on Washington's birthday."

The maxim proved its reliability. Enough nickels and pennies came (a very few of them from the hills) to make the flag an assured fact. But with them came one stern rebuke—from Mr. Schlitz, of course. The object of the collection had been stated with great exactness, also that it was taken on this date only as a matter of con-

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venience. But children are proverbially untrustworthy as reporters. The salient points that remained in the minds of the youthful Schlitzes when they reached home were but two, namely: that it was Washington's birthday, and that they must bring money. Mr. Schlitz put these two unrelated facts together and scented fraud.

"I gif not one cent to George Washington," he wrote indignantly. "He hass been long time dead!"

But a thought more revolutionary than that of flags and festivities, or even of educational lectures, was beginning to take form in Eleanor Dinwoody's unflagging brain. These things were all good enough in a way, but they did not go to the root of the matter. What these people needed was to know how to get more out of the soil they tilled; to raise better crops; to have better stock; to do something that would bring them in more money. Only when that was accomplished could they have better homes and broader lives.

It was a subject that wiser heads than hers had been pondering. She sent for the result of their cogitations wherever she could lay her hands upon them, and studied these. Only in the Corn Club could she see any possible solution of the problem as it affected Limestone Ridge. The fathers were hopeless. She knew that, because they were intrenched behind precedent and complacency,—two powerful barriers in the path of progress. But nothing is hopeless with a child, she thought, if one takes him in time.

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She turned then to reports and letters—answers to those she wrote—on the subject of the Corn Club. It took possession of her. She left Neil and Bess to struggle on with literature as best they might while she studied statistics and agricultural bulletins. It *was* feasible, she told herself at last; it was a perfectly feasible thing if she could only secure somebody to take charge of it. She could be the propulsive power in starting it, but a Corn Club demanded masculinity in its leader. Who was there in the neighbourhood that had in him the elements of leadership? Mr. Burson? Hardly; Mr. Burson was a good farmer and a successful one, but he was too old to be rich in initiative. . . . Neil? Well, Neil wouldn't lack the elements of leadership, but she would hardly dare to propose him for membership in *another* club. . . . How about Mr. Gilmer? She had been gravitating toward Mr. Gilmer all the time by a process of elimination—and perhaps by attraction too.

But would he do it? Mr. Burson said he was one of the best farmers in the country, but he didn't concern himself much about other people's failures. . . . Could she persuade him to do it, she wondered. Her working maxim came to her with startling force: You never can tell . . . until you try.

Nerved by it and the urgency of her need, she put on her wraps one Sunday afternoon and walked over to Crow's Roost.

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XXII

AT CROW'S ROOST

AT the door of the stone house perched like an eyrie on the hill Eleanor paused to look around her. It was a gloomy place, as stone houses are unless they have the accessories that this one lacked. Massive and forbidding, even the lack of moat and portcullis could not rid one of the feeling that it was a castle, where its occupants might well afford to laugh at the efforts of a besieging host.

There was no bell, but a tarnished brass knocker in keeping with the door invited use. As its clang resounded through the hall a dog's bark broke the silence within, and then a man's voice speaking to him. It brought back vividly to her remembrance the time she stood here trembling with fear that black, black night and waited for his coming.

Burton Gilmer's dismay at sight of her was undisguised. "Why, Miss Dinwoody!" He cast a glance behind him as if he contemplated retreat within his castle, but gentlemanly instincts prevailed. "Won't you come in? I'm afraid this room is not quite presentable. I wasn't expecting company——"

The floor was strewn with newspapers, the hearth un-

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swept. He had had a swift vision of her well-kept living-room.

"Now, I don't mind this in the least, Mr. Gilmer, and I hope you won't. It looks as if you had been having a good time anyway, and it is warm." She stepped to the open fire and held out her hands. "It is frosty outside."

He threw a hickory log upon the fire, sending a shower of sparks up the chimney and ashes over the hearth. "Bring me a broom," she commanded with housewifely instinct, and when he obeyed took it from him and brushed up the stone flagging.

A strange intoxicating feeling came over him to see her tidying his hearth. "This is the kind of thing that women can do," she said, almost as if in answer to his thought. "This is woman's true work, they say. It is about that I came over to talk to you."

"About woman's work?" he repeated, mystified.

"No. About man's work. I suppose I was continuing what was in my own mind."

"I thought you couldn't be answering what was in mine," he said, quietly, "though it seemed like it. What it is on your mind that you wish to be rid of?"

They were sitting on each side of the roaring, crackling fire of hickory logs. She had picked up a paper or two mechanically and placed them on a table. A sense of comfort diffused itself through the room. But it was not sufficient to delay her business.

"Mr. Gilmer, you raise corn, don't you?"

"Yes."

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"Do you know anything about managing a Corn Club?"

"A Corn *Club?* No. The extent of my knowledge is a corn *field*. Why do you ask?"

"I want somebody to manage a Corn *Club*. And it must be somebody that knows all about a corn *field*. So you are eligible." She put before him her plan for the boys of the neighbourhood. He considered it a while in silence, her eager eyes searching his face meanwhile. Then he shook his head.

"It wouldn't work."

"Why not? It works in other places. They have them in different States and different parts of this State. It is no new thing. It works beautifully in other places. But it won't work itself, of course."

"These people have too many years of inertia back of them. They are satisfied to live as their fathers lived—and the fathers didn't have very good methods."

"That just why I want to start this club. Don't they need to be taught better ways of doing things?"

"They certainly do."

"Then let's teach them. *I* don't know how to farm, but you do. And you can show these boys. If you will do it, I'll agree to furnish the club. I know my boys would go into it. They haven't years of inertia back of them—except by inheritance. Let's save them from acquiring it."

He smiled at her earnestness. How pretty she was, her

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eyes shining with enthusiasm and the bright colour rising to her cheeks as she talked.

"I could pave the way by talking it up with them and telling them what the clubs have accomplished in other places. Or I will put all my literature on the subject into your hands. With that and your personal knowledge and experience—and your use of language—you could give a beautiful lecture—the third in the course."

He laughed. "I am no lecturer."

"We'll call it a talk, then. I have quantities of statistics about this. One of the astonishing things of life to me is the way material drops into one's hands when she is looking up any subject. Now won't you do it, Mr. Gilmer?"

"Why don't you get Burson? He raises better corn than I do."

"You know he couldn't lecture."

"You suggested to me that it needn't be called a lecture. He can talk, and talk intelligently. You might have to edit the discourse before publishing it."

She laughed outright at this, having an idea of how it would look in type.

"What he would say would be practical and sound," he continued. "These people back here in the woods look up to Burson as a successful farmer. What he says would have weight with them. Nothing succeeds, you know, like success—in farming as in other things."

"I know. That's why I came to you. And like rank it imposes obligation. Don't you think so?"

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"It has never imposed much on me. Perhaps I haven't had it in sufficient quantity. No, I go my way and let my neighbour travel his. In that at least I follow the Golden Rule."

"An obligation is not unexistent because unacknowledged," she reminded him. "I wish you would do it!"

He shook his head.

"Get Neil. Neil raises good corn. And he has any number of new-fangled ideas about farming that he got up at the Agricultural College."

"But would you be willing for him to do it?" she asked, in astonishment. "I should dearly love to have Neil—but——"

"What I am willing for Neil to do doesn't seem to enter into his calculations these days," he remarked, dryly. "But why shouldn't I be?"

"I don't know. There's no reason, I suppose—only—well, you opposed his working with me in the other thing—the literature class, and——"

"Well, this is different—in several ways," he said, with a twitch of his mouth that she hardly understood. "I approve of this thing's being tried—though I haven't much faith in it. And I am perfectly willing for Neil to undertake it. I think he will do it well and it will be a good experience for him."

"Oh, Neil will be fine! I only thought that you would not——"

"Well, to prove that I am not entirely without public spirit I'll give you the money for the prize."

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"Oh, will you?" she cried. "How perfectly lovely! I've been wondering what we could do about that. Now with a prize provided, and a leader—if Neil will do it—I certainly can manage to enlist the boys."

"I don't doubt it. But isn't this a suffragette club? Where do the girls come in?"

"Oh, girls can't compete with boys in raising corn. And I never want to see women engage in a losing fight. I would rather have them excel in their own line. That's why I swept the hearth and let you scatter ashes. Every man to his specialty—and woman to hers. Do you notice how neatly I walked around 'his or hers'? . . . No, I am going to have a flower competition for the girls. I had thought that all out before I entered upon the other; but now it is entirely secondary in my mind. For, to come down to actual truth, Mr. Gilmer, what these people need is to be taught how to get more out of the soil they till. Then, and not till then, can they ever make their homes better."

"You are right in that," he said without reservation.

"I think so. Flower-beds are all right. They help. But you can't expect lives of grinding poverty and barrenness to blossom into beauty by mere force of a flower-bed,—now can you?—either in city or country. But they do their part, and we mustn't expect any one agency to do it all. So—after my Corn Club is started I shall give a talk (maybe we will call it a 'lecture,' just to fill out the 'course') on 'Beautifying the Home,' or some of those lady-like topics affected by the *antis,* with

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a distribution of seeds and a flower competition to follow. I wish it could be a distribution of paint instead. Maybe I will bring in paint incidentally. Only that is a question dependent upon money and the brethren."

"I think I will go to hear your lecture. I need some ideas on beautifying the home, myself." He looked around the room significantly, and her eye—following—took in its bareness.

"Do. I'll promise not to say anything to hurt your feelings or to antagonize—you know we are told to be *very* careful not to antagonize. This lecture is going to be strictly conservative—all about man, noble man, the breadwinner; and woman, the weak and clinging, as home-maker and beautifier—and all the rest. You are familiar with it to satiety, no doubt (not to say nausea), but it may be new to them. It is all true—only you do get so sick of hearing it that you want to rise up sometimes and deny it, just for the sake of putting some spice in the dish."

"Some of your audience may want to rise up and deny it for another reason," he said, dryly. "Noble woman does her full part down here, where half of them milk the cows and make the gardens if they have any."

"Oh, how demoralizing to the sex!"

"Which one?"

"The *other* one, of course."

They laughed at the ambiguity this involved them in and then he asked, "Where will you get your seeds?"

"I have them. As soon as I thought this flower com-

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petition out I stated the case to a seed firm in the East—simply stated it and asked for seed; and they sent me a liberal supply. It is perfectly amazing to me the way people respond—as if they were just waiting for an opportunity."

"It isn't strange to me," he answered her, with a meaning look into her eager face. "You would wheedle compliance out of a wooden Indian."

"I didn't wheedle it out of you. And, Mr. Gilmer, I didn't ask you for that money. I never once thought of such a thing."

"I know you didn't. I am giving that to get out of your lecture course."

"You are giving it," she said, with both feeling and perspicacity, "because of your big, generous heart that you try so hard to keep out of sight. I know who it was that employed the ravens. I've always known."

He protested, and in his embarrassment picked up nearly all the papers on the floor. But her praise was very sweet in his ears.

When she rose to go, he said, "I'll walk with you. And would you like to see the 'sink hole' I was telling you about?"

"Oh, yes! I have so much curiosity about that. Is it near here?"

"Yes, a quarter of a mile or so back in the woods. Are you a good walker?"

"Fine!"

They passed out at the back of the house, for the place

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lay that way, across the large yard, past the garden and through the orchard and on toward the woodland at the north. As they passed through the yard Eleanor's keen glance took in all the details,—the hillside descending by easy stages to the river bottom and the river itself beyond. Not one jot of it all did she fail to see, but the thing that stood out in her memory afterwards was a neatly paled enclosure in a far corner of the yard under a mammoth oak whose gnarled branches, shaken bare of leaves, were silhouetted against the western sky. A gate was on the house side of this little enclosure and a faintly defined path led to it. Within it was a solitary grave with a white headstone.

She knew it must be Neil's mother that was lying there —the young mother that had given up her life for her child—and she was smitten with a pang of pity for the unknown girl who had so early met a woman's fate.

Mr. Gilmer called her attention to the view—the distant river and the bluffs rising like sentinels above it, and the road winding down among the bare trees—but nothing more. If he even saw the mound with its little headstone, he did not speak of it.

"The fields and meadows are on the other side," he told her in answer to her questions, "and my pasture too. This piece of woods I have never cleared."

"It looks like the forest primeval," she said when they were in the darkness and gloom of it.

"When I came here it was all like this. I've cleared it by degrees."

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"You have not always lived here then, as Mr. Rand has?"

"No."

The word was pleasantly uttered but it effectually barred progress. A monosyllable can be like a stone wall dropped down in the path of the conversational excursionist. In this one there appeared no opening leading to the highway beyond. There was nothing for Miss Dinwoody to do but stop and retrace her steps. It was not difficult to retreat gracefully. The trees around her —the endless varieties of oak with their shades of difference, so indistinguishable to her but so pronounced to him with his more exact wood-lore; the characteristic architecture of the different trees in their winter undress,—all these were impersonal subjects that she made haste to avail herself of. By the time they reached their objective point they were chatting as freely as though no disquieting monosyllable had dropped between them.

"What is this?" she asked, pointing to a tree that seemed alone of its kind.

"That is a sweet-gum."

"I thought so. Have you ever heard it called the liquidamber?"

"Yes, but I like the other name best."

"So do I now. In fact, I'm prejudiced against any other. It was the stage-driver that did it. I had just made the acquaintance of the dress-up name of the old tree of my childhood and when, coming down here, we came to one, I remarked, 'This is a liquidamber, isn't

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it?' You know how we like to air newly acquired knowledge. But I got my just deserts. 'Liquid nothin'," he said with measureless contempt, 'hit's a sweet-gum.' I learned then never to try to show off before a stage-driver."

They stood at last on the brink of the "sink hole" and peered into its depths. It was exactly what its unpoetic name implied—a great, round, sunken basin broad enough and deep enough and old enough for tall trees to have grown up within its confines and not yet have reached the top. A twisted old grapevine climbing from its depths had laid hold of a sturdy black-jack on the rim and was slowly bringing it down to its doom.

"It will go some day," he said when she called attention to it, "as the boulders down there have gone. They are covered with snow now, but in the summer they are only half hidden by the ferns."

"Have you ever been down in this?"

"Often. When Neil was a boy one of our favourite haunts was this old sink hole. Here is where we start down. Neil was very proud the first time he did it."

It made a strong appeal to her imagination—the solitary man and the lonely little child trying to make companions of Nature.

"See that shelf of rock," she said. "The wall is almost solid on that side. I wonder what makes these places."

"The same power that made the whole 'uplift,' I suppose. They are to be found all through this region—

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sometimes larger than this and not always round. This one happens to be on my land. I am not much of a geologist but I have always believed they were volcanic in origin. It is invariably on the high points that they are found. Perhaps they were once craters—outlets for hidden fires—who knows?"

"They look it. I should think they would fill up and become small lakes."

"They don't hold water. Evidently they have some subterranean outlet."

They circled the great bowl slowly, taking in its details from every point of view. "Don't go too near," he cautioned, taking her by the arm and drawing her back.

"Oh, there's no danger. Hold me so I can look down. I want to see that ledge just below us."

He tightened his grip. "Well,—only don't go too close. There!—that's far enough.'

"Nonsense!" she cried gayly. "I'm going to see that——"

What she was to see was never told. Without warning she experienced a sickening sensation of crumbling foundation, of slipping feet, of falling into the measureless depths we know in dreams. Then—she felt herself dragged back by the superhuman strength of Burton Gilmer's arms.

"Eleanor!" he said, thickly. "Eleanor! *Good God!*"

She released herself from his clasp. "You didn't do

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that, did you—just to frighten me? I—I hardly know what happened." She looked half dazed.

"To frighten you?" he said, his very lips colourless. "To frighten you! Why, *child,* you were slipping into eternity!"

It was this, she told herself that night as she lived over the scene and felt herself again in his strong arms, it was his calling her child that made her cry then when she realized it all, and cling to him when that awful sense of falling came to her again, and act just like a silly, hysterical girl! She always wanted to cry when he called her "child."

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XXIII

APRIL HOPES

IT was late in the winter that the church was organized.

"There is no reason why it shouldn't be now," said Willis Rand, talking to Eleanor one day at the schoolhouse. He had fallen much into the habit of dropping in upon her there when he was at Limestone Ridge. "I have gone among the people and canvassed the thing thoroughly. I believe the time is ripe. The preliminary work is done; the foundations laid, and I confidently believe—laid right."

"This was all done before we came, of course."

He looked at her with a significant smile and shook his head. "No—since."

A red tide mounted to cheek and brow and spread to her very ear-tips. It was impossible to misunderstand his meaning.

"Why, Mr. *Rand!*"

"It is true. And it is only barest justice to say it. The cornerstone of this church was laid when you said in this room one night, 'I'm ready now.' You don't seem to be aware of it, but you have been putting in foundations ever since. And you've laid them in the lasting cement of love to God and humanity. That

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holds. You've builded better than you knew, Miss Dinwoody. This church—this spiritual structure that we hope to see rise here in the wilderness—will take its place as one dedicated before its birth—to service. Could Christ's church have a mission more in accord with His teachings?" He stepped to the board and wrote in bold script,

"Ich dien."

"Please God," he said reverently, "the motto of this church shall be through the ripening years as it has been in these germinating months—'I serve.'"

"Oh, Mr. Rand," she cried, distressed, "I feel so humiliated when you say such things to me. It isn't the great commandment, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God,' that I have been thinking about at all. It is only the people—these poor people and their needs."

"'And the second is like unto it,'" he quoted gently, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'"

After a time he said a little hesitatingly, "Miss Dinwoody, I know I can count unpon your help, but aren't you going to come into active membership with this church?" It was the first time he had broached the personal side of this question to her and he did it with some trepidation. She met him as frankly as if he had asked her to join the flower competition.

"I certainly am. I want this church here. And I am glad to be one of its charter members. If I had been asked six months ago to do this I probably should have

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held off and said: 'I can be as good a Christian out of the church as in it.' But I see the fallacy of that argument now as I didn't once. If I have learned anything down here (besides how to make ends meet) it is the power of co-operation. It may be true that I can be as *good* a Christian out of the church as in, but I cannot possibly be as efficient. It was only when these boys joined forces with some one else and worked to the same end that they accomplished anything. I doubt our right to curtail our efficiency and still claim to be doing our best."

"I am heartily glad," he said. "You will be an untold power for good as you have already been."

She disclaimed this, but went on. "Then there is another reason why I am so ready to go in. Do you remember Jim Foree, the big fellow that began by clearing the cemetery and ended as road overseer under Mr. Duggins? Jim is a splendid fellow. He's a leader among the boys; and he has been such a help to me. He waited after Sunday school one day and said, 'Miss Dinwoody, what about this here church Mr. Rand is layin' off to start? Are you goin' to jine it?' 'What are *you* going to do?' I asked. '*Jest exactly what you do,*' he answered. 'Ef it's good enough for you it's good enough for me.' 'Let's go into it, Jim,' I said, 'and see if we can't make it good enough for the boys.' And we shook hands on it."

"I believe you and Jim got at the root of the matter. Limestone Ridge is not a place where the bond of intel-

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lectual creed will hold. In the homes I go into are people of unbelief and no belief and beliefs held so hard and fast that they have become like Chinese idols—something to bow down before but powerless to help in time of need. What does Jim Foree know about what he believes? But he knows what he wants to do, and that is to serve God and help this community. Unanimity of purpose is what will hold us together, not unity of creed. And may that purpose always be the one embodied in the motto which I have put on your board—and will now proceed to erase."

"Oh, don't," she cried. "Mr. Schlitz is going to play a solo for us Sunday on his cello and that motto will catch his eye because it is German, and I will have a chance to give him your little sermon. Or you will."

The church thrived. So did the Corn Club. So did the corn the boys put in. There was nothing miraculous about it in any case,—nothing the least out of the course of Nature. All three were planted in faith, watered in hope, tended with labour and personal pains. Then naturally God gave the increase.

Neil Gilmer took direction of the Corn Club, which went forward with enthusiasm. Certainly no better selection of a leader could have been made, for Neil was full of the vim of youth, and had a newly acquired fund of scientific knowledge just waiting to be applied. Moreover, he possessed the needful ballast of common sense and experience—young as he was. The advantages of a

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leader old enough and not too old are incalculable. What he had learned at the Agricultural College could now be tested. Letters were sent out to his instructors there, and answers and circulars came back full of help and inspiration. (Nothing miraculous about that, either. It is what happens always when one reaches out the hand.)

Things were unusually lively at Limestone Ridge that spring. A Corn Club was a novelty in that region and there was no lack of applicants for membership, particularly when the discovery was made that there was a pot of gold at the end of this rainbow.

The terms were easy. Each boy was to plan one eighth of an acre for this special competition, and was to plow and plant and cultivate it alone until harvest time. The prizes were to cover both the yield and the quality of corn. Then came most absorbing discussions of seed-corn, with illuminating exhibits from the granaries of Mr. Burson and the Gilmers. The boys from the woods had been asked to bring specimens of corn from their own fields and they were all on exhibition at the school-house. Comparison is a fruitful source of knowledge. The boys awoke to their first doubt of the truth of a sentiment they had heard preached all their lives that "corn is corn," and "hogs is hogs." Could such a small thing as a seed account for the difference in this corn? The fathers were called in sometimes to decide this question.

Mr. Burson, soon enlisted, gave practical talks on the value of early plowing and early planting and the

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selection of right places for their plots. He even agreed to become an advisory committee on this subject when desired. Also, Mr. Schlitz, who knew nothing of corn-growing, was ready to give advice. Agricultural bulletins were distributed which furnished not only food for thought but for debate at home, with not infrequent contemptuous criticism of the whole scheme as "book-farming."

"Humph!" said Job Tatum with conclusive logic. "I been raisin' corn sence befo' Neil Gilmer was born!"

"And he kin beat you at it now, pap," Job's boy retorted. "We-all don't raise no sech corn as the Gilmers do."

But the stirring up of discussion was productive of good, and as a rule the fathers were interested in what the youthful competitors were engaging in, for the very obvious and human reason that they were their own boys.

Of course Tom and Hunter Dinwoody were both fired with the prevalent enthusiasm and without conscious effort added enough to their stock of field-lore to aid materially in the cultivation of their *one* eighth and several other *eight* eighths that were demanded of them. That they were the men of the family was kept before them, to their moral stretching up. It was their ambition to provide corn enough for the needs of man and beast next year, for at the school meeting held early in April a term of eight months was promptly decided upon and Miss Dinwoody unanimously asked to take the school

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for another year. So there would be no more provender obtained by barter.

With specialized work in corn-growing, and gardening, and grape-culture, which was now the order of the day at The Vineyard, the study of literature languished. Life itself was so much more absorbing than anything man had written about life. There was no lack of hard work for any one of them, but after all it was in a beautiful world—a world that opened up new each day with fresh endeavour and the charm of "green things growing."

Yes, a beautiful, living, throbbing world it was to them all, but to Bess—ah, to Bess these spring days brought a new heaven and a new earth. The song her heart was singing was the very same the birds sang now in the woods around her. That this should be so was as inevitable as dawn. She and her lover had been drawn toward one another by the natural forces of mutual attraction, the full pulses of youth, close, intimate companionship, and isolation from others of their kind. With life quickening all about them, their lives flowed together as naturally and irresistibly as two converging streams meet and blend.

Eleanor saw it coming and trembled as one does at the silent onsweep of any great force, but she was powerless to turn it aside. And, indeed, she felt no wish to do so. What happier fate could she ask for Bess than to be loved by a manly young fellow like Neil Gilmer—one in whom her heart could safely trust? A picture rose

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before her of the girl in a home of her own, with husband, children, and

> "the dear homely cares
> That make most full a woman's life."

If a dull aching came into Eleanor Dinwoody's throat then it is small wonder. This was woman's best estate —she had seen enough of life to know it—and somehow it had passed her by. Well—she was glad it was coming to Bess.

So when the girl came to her one night after Neil was gone, and kneeling beside her in the moonlight told her all about it—all her wonderful sweet secret—she was not surprised but only glad for her and took her in her arms as her mother might have done, and kissed her and listened and cried over her a very little. For love has always in it hidden possibilities of sadness that call forth women's prescient tears.

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CHAPTER XXIV

A BOLT FROM A CLEAR SKY

IT was the day following this disclosure that Eleanor Dinwoody sat in the dormer window of her bedroom looking out upon the hills, instead of writing the letter she had begun. The house was very still; the boys were in the field, Bess had gone over to Mr. Padgett's, taking Juddie with her, and Eczema was on "Mount Roosevelt" for a visit. It was a good time to write, but the hills held the mistress of The Vineyard. She had just written:

"MADGE, I wish you could sit beside me to enjoy this scene. You know nothing defines low-lying hills like a mist. On a clear sun-lit day they are only a solid mass of trees on an elevation—nothing more. But look out upon them when the mist is hanging over the valleys and you find they are not one elevation but many, rising one beyond another, with all the grace of Nature's curves. Then you know that every wreath of mist stands for a beautiful slope, with another facing it, and between them a stream winding its way down to the distant sea—a tiny, gurgling, innocent-looking streamlet that becomes a tearing, roaring torrent sometimes.

"How beautiful it all is! This is why I had my dormers built—that I might look out upon it in all its phases and drink peace into my soul. I think often

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of a dear old aunt of mine in New Hampshire, who had had a life of toil around a kitchen sink, but whose soul was tuned to all the harmonies of nature. From the window in front of her constantly recurring dish-washing was the most beautiful scene I ever saw—of hill and dale and pastoral life. I remarked upon it. 'Yes,' she said, 'nobody knows the hard places this view has helped me over.'

"I believed her, for on her face was the peace of God. These things sink into one's innermost being; they do into mine, anyway. When I am sore bestead, I take me to my sky parlour and look out on the everlasting hills. Madge, the geologists tell us that this mammoth Ozark dome was the first of all the great state to emerge from the waste of waters. Think of having as one's daily companion something that has stood steadfast and immovable since time was! I tell you it steadies one. And at times we all need——"

The sentence was left unfinished. Eleanor's eyes, looking out toward the hills, had fallen upon a moving object nearer at hand that banished from her mind all scenes of beauty, however soul-steadying. It was Burton Gilmer fastening his horse and buggy at her gate.

Since that memorable day at the "sink hole" she had seen him only in the most casual manner—never for any connected conversation, and the first thought that flashed through her brain was that now she would have opportunity for an uninterrupted talk. She had always wanted to tell him how ashamed she was of her

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hysterical behaviour that day after she realized what he had saved her from.

But when she met him at the door his haggard face and the gravity of his manner put all thoughts of herself from her mind.

"Why, Mr. Gilmer, are you ill?" The words broke from her before she had time to think of their impropriety.

"No." It was one of his disconcerting monosyllables that led nowhere.

"Won't you come in?"

"I had come to ask you to go with me for a drive," he said, with some hesitation, "but—are you alone?"

"Entirely. Bess and Juddie are away for the afternoon and the boys are in the field. Why do you ask?"

He put his hat on the table and sat down:

"I will not ask you to go then, I think. What I have come to say can be better said here, perhaps, if you are alone."

She drew a chair near him and sat down weakly, a sense of impending disaster upon her.

"What is it, Mr. Gilmer? Have you bad news to tell me? Is it about Neil? Is Neil ill?"

"No-o," he said, in a mechanical way, as if he were thinking of something else, "no—Neil is well—or he was at breakfast time. I haven't seen him since."

"You haven't been home——"

"No." He gave a short laugh that was like the crackling of thorns under a pot. "No—I've been roam-

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ing the hills to-day, trying to get away from myself. . . . But I can't do it . . . and so I have come to you."

This mood was so new to her—his meaning so incomprehensible—that she was at a loss how to answer him. "If I can do anything——" she began.

"Oh, we can't any of us do anything—but——" And he stopped.

"Mr. Gilmer," she said, with some impatience, "I wish you would tell me what you are talking about. I haven't the remotest idea."

"Has your niece told you what occurred last night?" he asked, abruptly.

"She told me that your nephew had asked her to marry him—yes." Her manner had grown suddenly distant. A light was breaking upon the situation. In her fondness for Bess and her assured confidence that in all things that counted—birth, breeding, education, character—she was a worthy mate for the young man who wished to make her his wife, she had not even considered opposition on Mr. Gilmer's part, except as he might object to his nephew's marrying at all. She had thought of that the night before, but had at once cast it aside. Neil was a man, and, as he had said once before, had the right to make his own life as his uncle had made his. But she discerned disapprobation in Burton Gilmer's tone, and it piqued and angered her.

"And Neil told me this morning. We can't complain of delayed confidences, at least. . . . But, Miss Dinwoody, I can't let this go on—without——"

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"I don't know that we will be able to prevent it, Mr. Gilmer, however much we might desire to do so."

She was filled with resentment at his opposition and meant that he should know it. But evidently he was not thinking of her and her attitude in the matter at all. It was some deeper emotion that stirred him; and whatever it was, it gripped him hard. She found her wounded pride melting away before it and the suffering in his face. Apparently, he had not noticed her remark, and she spoke again, this time more gently, though with dignity:

"Mr. Gilmer, will you tell me whether your opposition to this engagement, this marriage if it should ever come to that, is from some personal objection to my niece?"

"Some personal objection?" he repeated, as if that thought had but just presented itself. "Why, no! certainly not. Your niece impresses me as a girl of sterling worth,—so far as you can ever know what a woman is —or will be under strain."

She was thinking, "It's the money!" and her next words voiced the thought: "She *is* a girl of sterling worth and of strong character. She has proved that by the way she has met privation. Perhaps you would not call that strain, but I do. . . . Of course, though, she has nothing to bring to Neil but herself, and——"

He broke in impatiently: "Would you suppose I would be likely to care for that? Money doesn't count for much, down here in the woods. It is in the cities, or at least where they have 'civilization,' that they bow

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down to money. . . . I only wish it were possible for this love between our young people to come to fruition. It might. . . . I would have thought so once . . . now I don't know—I don't know. . . . It's not likely." Then, as if bracing himself: "Miss Dinwoody, before it goes any farther there is something I feel it is your right to know; and I find it very hard to tell you."

He got to his feet abruptly and walked back and forth, back and forth, and finally to the mantel, where he stood resting his arm upon it and looking at her:

"If I could talk with her father instead of you——"

The words had a sinister meaning to her. Her heart grew sick within her. But she lifted an undaunted front:

"Mr. Gilmer, I am the head of this household. I stand in the place of this girl's dead father. Whatever you would say to him you may say to me. If you know anything that will affect her future and that I ought to know, I beg that you will tell it to me plainly—without evasion or indirection. What is it?"

Thus urged, he spoke—spoke deliberately and low, but the tense vibrations of his voice seemed to fill the room and pound upon her ears:

"Miss Dinwoody,—Neil—has not even—a *name*—to offer your niece. The one he bears is his mother's. He cannot lawfully lay claim to any other."

He threw back his head and met her gaze, half-defiantly. It was but for a moment, though. Then he turned away from the white stillness of her face.

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Eleanor Dinwoody sat not moving, scarcely breathing. Her heart beat so tumultuously that it almost seemed as if her breath would be shut off. The impact of the blow, so unexpected, stunned her. It seemed as if the end of all things had come. Then following this, with a strange roaring in her head, came that weird feeling we all have sometimes of being somebody else. It was not she, Eleanor Dinwoody, and Burton Gilmer that were together here, that had been talking but a minute ago, but two actors in a play. She wondered dully what would be the next thing they would do or say. . . . Then came swift thought of Neil. . . . Poor Neil! . . . Could he know? That dear, frank, open-hearted boy! . . . And Bess! . . . Oh, what were they all to do?

As if that voiceless cry reached him in the profound stillness, the man at the window turned and sat down beside her.

"Child," he said, so gently that the quick tears pressed against her downcast lids, "I would have spared you this if I could, and spared us all. But there seemed nothing else to do. I felt that it was your right to know this before it was too late."

"Too late?" she repeated, questioningly.

"Yes. I know the ways of women—better than you suppose. I want her to have an opportunity to withdraw from this engagement now. It will be a wrench—but they will live through it."

The look on his face was so hard, so cynical, so different from that worn when he had sat down by her

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and called her "child" that it almost seemed to her there were two beings within this man.

"I do not feel at all sure that she will want to withdraw from it," she said; "unless she felt that Neil had—— Mr. Gilmer, does Neil know of this?"

"No—not a breath. It has been kept from him scrupulously. I never meant that he should know it. I have lived under the shadow of this thing for the best part of my life. I meant that he should be free from it. And he has been. Never was there a sunnier nature than Neil's. Would it have been, think you, if he had known the black cloud that rested over his name? Hardly. Well, I've done that much for him if nothing more. But I can't save him always. He is a man now; he must take up a man's burdens."

They were silent for a time; then he said, significantly: "You know now why I tried to prevent their intercourse last winter. Casual meetings he might have withstood, but I well knew that he could not come day by day under the charm of a sweet young presence like hers without exactly this result. I was not altogether unreasonable—though I knew both you and Neil thought me so."

"But they were so young," she protested. "I did not once think of danger."

"Ah-h!" he said, with a groan. "It is to the young that the deepest tragedies come. She was not quite sixteen—my little Lucy—when this man entered her life; when she was seventeen she was in her grave. It doesn't take long for a drama like that to be off the boards."

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She sat perfectly still. It was all so horrible and so hopeless.

"It isn't worth while to go into that story. It is too hard. And you know it without the telling. But I don't want you to think too hardly of my poor little girl. She was more sinned against than sinning—and as I look back upon it all I can see that I was far from blameless myself. You see, she was left to my care by the death of my father when we were little more than children—I a boy of twenty and she only twelve. My mother had died years before. We lived on at the old home in Memphis, after my father's death, with Aunt Ailsy, the faithful old negro that had nursed us both, in charge, and an invalid aunt of my mother's as nominal head of the household. She was very old and absorbed in herself and her ailments; and I in my work, for I was entering upon the study of medicine, young as I was. I studied in St. Louis and, after my graduation, went into a hospital as interne. I was to be a surgeon, and I loved the work as I have loved few other things in my life. But——" He did not speak of the sacrifice he had made in giving it up, but she could well guess what it had been.

"One day when my sister was not quite sixteen, I went home for the holidays and brought into it a man I had known at the medical school—and had called friend. I introduced him to her—my little girl that seemed almost like my child—whom I would have given my life to protect if necessary—*I* brought them together. Then,

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poor blind mole that I was, I went back to my fool's paradise in St. Louis and my work there, supposing that he had gone to his in another city. He did not go. He stayed. He won her heart and blasted her life. Then he went away.

"When I was called back from St. Louis a few months later by the death of this old aunt, I learned from Aunt Ailsy's lips the whole pitiful story. . . . Oh, if there be a hell," he lifted up his clenched hand to heaven, "I pray God he may reach its lowest depths! . . . *And he will!*

"When I heard that story I suppose I went wild. I was crazed with rage and grief and shame. With a loaded revolver in my pocket for him, I trailed that man from city to city. I think he must have known I was on his track, for he was always just ahead. It was in New Orleans that I lost him. When I was convinced that he had escaped me I went back—first to St. Louis"—watching him with intent eyes she saw a subtle change pass over his face, as though the name brought some poignant memories of its own, but it passed and he went on—"to see about—some final things—and to give up my place at the hospital. Then I went back to Memphis.

"I had one friend there that I knew I could trust—just one—John Hardeman, a lawyer. He had had charge of my sister's business and mine after my father's death and I had gone with him once to the Ozarks on a hunting trip. I thought of the place now as one remote and inaccessible—a refuge for those who needed it.

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"I went to him and told him enough to seal his lips, and left all business matters in his hands. He is the one person in all the world who has known through these years where I could be found. Then with the faithful old woman who has been mother to us both—and more than mother to Neil since—I brought her here—my little crippled bird that was never to use wing or voice again! . . . And I was hard on her. I did not believe her story —would hear nothing in extenuation. . . . Ah-h, I was hard on her!"

"Poor child!" she said. And at the infinite compassion of her tone his head dropped upon his hand. "Mr. Gilmer," after what seemed a long, long time, "don't tell me any more. And don't reproach yourself too bitterly. The tenderness you failed to give her you have made up to her child. I know that from Neil." Then—hardly daring—"Is he living—that man?"

"I don't know. From that day to this our paths have never crossed. But"—he sat up—"they may! They may yet. And when they do"—again she shrank from him at the look of evil that darkened his face; it was as if she had suddenly peered into unsuspected depths of blackness—"when they do, and my grip is on his throat, *God Almighty himself can't shake it off!*"

They talked it over long and in all its bearings. What was to be done? It was the present and its weight of responsibility that occupied them now.

"Why need they be told at all?" she asked, at last.

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"They are happy in each other's love, and we are both satisfied to have it so. Why rake up the past to their future humiliation and distress?"

"I have been through that temptation," he said, grimly. "Then I put it behind me and came to you. I felt that it was your right as her guardian to know. Beyond that I frankly confess I do not know what is our duty in the matter. If we could only feel sure that it would never come out—but these things always do—and, while it would be sorrow to them now, it might be tragedy afterwards. I am afraid—I am afraid they ought to be told. . . . But whatever we do should be done only after careful deliberation. We can't afford to make a mistake. Think it over well before you give me any answer—for I am going to leave it with you. I have advised Neil not to speak to you about it for the present—to let you adjust yourself to the idea of it. I will see you again—in three or four days, perhaps. Will that give you time enough?"

When he left her he took her hand in a firm clasp and held it while he spoke: "Good-bye, child. God help us all! . . . I should hate to have sorrow come to them, but—I don't know! . . . Good-bye! . . . I feel strangely weak to-day."

When he was gone she went upstairs and locked the door and threw herself face downward on the bed. Oh, *what ought she to do?*

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CHAPTER XXV

THE DIE IS CAST

SHE asked herself that question often as the days went by—those fateful days whose end must bring forth her decision—asked it as she went about her daily tasks, as she tossed upon her bed, and sometimes with supplication as she knelt beside it in the darkness. But oftenest did she ask it as she looked into the radiant young face that

> "duly as the sun
> Rose up for her with day begun."

What ought she to do?

If only it were a personal decision, that would be easily made. She could always settle things for herself. But when the destinies of others were in one's hands and a turn this way or that might precipitate disaster —ah-h, that was harder!

They must look at it from every point of view, Mr. Gilmer had said; they must make no mistake. She had tried to do as he had said. But the very effort was confusing, for so sooner had she scanned one side with minute attention and come to a decision as to future action than, in turning to look at it from another angle, she found the former view distorted and out of focus. This

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question of duty is a very kaleidoscope for shifting aspect.

One hour the only right, the only merciful thing was to lock this dark secret in their breasts, never to be revealed; the next brought the chilling thought: What right had they to withhold knowledge from these two now which might break upon them later like a flood, to their undoing? . . . If only they could feel sure it would never, never be found out—but, as Mr. Gilmer said, these things always were. Suppose—just suppose—they should keep it from them now and in after years they should learn it all and reproach her—one or both—for the part she had played. Had she the right to take other lives into her hands like this? It was not for a day. This would last. Suppose the time should ever come when Bess would feel hard and bitter at the thought of her children bearing a tainted name. . . . She caught her breath at that. . . . Ah, how much better for her to know it now!

And Neil! If this knowledge should come to them in after life and he should feel—as any honourable man would—shame and chagrin that he had unwittingly trapped a woman into bearing for ever the weight of this dishonour—would he ever forgive her? She grew cold at the thought of what his reproaches might be. . . . And yet it was only that she wanted to spare them pain.

Amid these conflicting emotions and resolves she turned to the girl herself, a great yearning fear over-

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mastering her and almost swamping her discretion: "Bess, I hope nothing will ever come between you and Neil."

"Nothing ever will," Bess answered, with the cock-sureness of young love and inexperience. "Nothing could, you know, but death—or wrongdoing on Neil's part. And that will never be. If death should come,"—a shadow fell across the sweet young face, but a steadfast look was in her eyes,—"I should still have him—in my heart—and I would know that somewhere he was loving me. . . . But, Aunt Nell, don't talk about such things as death and what might come between us! You make me want to cry. I feel now that I couldn't live without Neil."

Eleanor put her arms around her, but did not desist.

"But if not death but some disaster came to him—some disgrace, we will say—would your affection outlive that? You see, I want to know about this love of yours," she added, playfully, "to satisfy myself it is the everlasting kind. Not all loves are, you know."

"Ours is," Bess asserted, confidently. "We've talked it over and we know. Nothing but death is ever going to separate us."

"Would not even disgrace?" persisted Eleanor, feeling the brink crumbling under her feet but not drawing back.

"Disgrace could never come to me through Neil. He is too honourable—too strong."

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"Yes, I believe he is, both strong and honourable. I would not let him have you if he were not, Bess. . . . But disgrace comes to us sometimes through no fault of ours. Suppose his uncle should do something that would bring humiliation to Neil——"

"Then he would need me all the more. And I would stand by him all the closer. . . . But, Aunt Nell, why do you say such things? You know Mr. Gilmer will never do anything to bring disgrace upon Neil."

"No," Eleanor said, "I am sure he never will. I was only trying to test your love, Bess, dear."

She thought this conversation over that night as she lay on her bed, and many times thereafter. "And she would do it, too," she told herself, with a thrill of pride. "She *would* stand by him just as she said. She would be true as steel!"

But because of this very fact the case needed all the more careful handling. A capacity for self-sacrifice sometimes needs to be restrained. Bess would be true and Neil would be true, but how bitterly they would both suffer. . . . And why should this hard, hard thing be forced upon them? Life was sorrowful enough at best. Why not save them this much? It seemed such a needless hurt.

Her thoughts turned often to her brother. If only he were here! What would he say? Would he, too, reproach her when she came to render an account of her stewardship? She shivered a little at that. He had been a poor man in this world's goods—poorer than

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if he had the blood of the grafter in his veins—but theirs had always been an unsullied name, and they had lived, she and her brother, in a simple community where character counted for more than money and was reckoned back for generations. Burton Gilmer's words came back to her with almost the force of a blow, "Neil has not even a *name* to offer her." . . . No, nor a name to give his children. That was the pitiful part of it. . . . *Oh, what ought she to do?*

It was a relief to talk to Aunt Ailsy. The old woman had taken her tubs out under the trees, and it was there that Eleanor heard again the sad little story that in all its repetitions through the centuries has never lost its pathos—the tale of man's perfidy and woman's love.

"Yaas'm, Marse Burton told me to tell you, Miss Eleanor,—looks like he wants you to know all about it, and he say I wasn't to spare him. I ain't gwine to, nuther! He was awful hard on her, Marse Burton was. He was proud-sperited in them days and the Gilmers helt a high haid whar they come from. It looked like it would kill him. He never did believe that story she told 'bout 'em bein' married somewhere way off yonder. She cried and cried and stuck to it they was, but when he called fer the paper that would say so she didn't have none, and when he looked it up where it would be writ down in a book—it warn't thar. . . . I don't know'm. Things was mightily ag'in her—there warn't nothin' but her word fer it . . . but somehow I always felt like *she* b'lieved it. She useter creep into my arms some-

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times and put her haid down on my shoulder—jes' like she did when she was a little bit of a thing after her mother died—and say, 'Mammy, I thought he was good.' . . . And there wasn't nothin' I could do but jes' pat her like she was my baby and say, 'Yes, honey, mammy knows.'

"You see, Marse Burton never would let her talk to him 'bout it after that one awful time they had—never would listen to a word. He was jes' as good to her as he could be 'bout everything else,—I ain't gwineter spare him 'bout that, nuther!—but he wouldn't let her talk to him 'bout that, and look like it jes' tuk all the sperit out of her—she didn't have enough lef' to go on livin', po' lamb!"

She wiped her eyes on her check apron, and Eleanor could not trust herself to speak.

"Yaas'm,"—she breathed a sigh,—"I reckon the Lord knowed what was best when he tuk 'er to her ma. Miss Lizy'd listen to her—she'd comfort her—'cause she was her mother—that's the way mothers is—they can't he'p it, I reckon. But Marse Burton, he was jes' her brother, you know—and that ain't like a mother . . . no'm! Then he was high-strung, and—seem like somethin' must a-hit him hard up in St. Louis, too. I never did know 'bout that, but when he come back from there he looked like death! Maybe it was him havin' to give up bein' one of them big doctors what gits lots of money fer cuttin' people up—I don't know'm—but somethin' made him powerful hard. There never was any mo' *boy* about him

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after he come back from St. Louis. And, of course, Miss Lucy was the cause of it all.

"But, Miss Eleanor, she warn't nothin' but a chile! Why, she useter be 'fraid of things, same as little chil'n is! Yaas'm, she was! When Marse Burton brung us up here our house was right in the woods, and the owls and whippoorwills would come up clost and hoot and holler, and it scared her. She got a notion in her haid the owls was a-mawkin' her, and sayin', 'Who—who *are* you?' and she uster think them other old night-birds was talkin' at her and callin': 'Whip-'er-well! Whip-'er-well! Whip-'er-well!'

"You know how clost they come—them whippoorwills—and how they'll norrate them words over and over again right in your face and at your ears till it looked like they'd bus' their throats or yo' haid, one—I've counted more'n forty times hand-runnin'—yaas'm, I is! when I was layin' on the flo' in Miss Lucy's room and she couldn't sleep. . . . Oh, yaas'm, I always tuk my bedclothes in every night and slep' 'longside er her bed. I couldn't leave that child in there by herself with all them wild creeturs hollerin' at her! . . . No'm!"

"Aunt Ailsy," said Eleanor, making no pretense now of hiding her tears, "I know you were God's comforter sent to that poor child!"

"Lord, honey," the old woman lamented, "there warn't nothin' I could do—only jes' look after her, and take keer of her—and keep on lovin' her jes' like I always did—and b'lieve in her. I reckon that helped her

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some, maybe. I always felt Miss Lucy *thought* she was tellin' the truth. Sho's you born, thar was some kind er pronouncement that she tuk fer a ceremony. And 'bout them whippoorwills,"—turning from the commonplace story of her own part in the played-out drama,—"many's the time I've got up sence and shooed them old night-birds off Miss Lucy's grave,—yaas'm. Seem like they was jes' possessed to set thar and holler at her. I think they're half devils, anyway, them whippoorwills! . . . Is you ever been over to Crow's Roost? . . .Well, maybe you've seen Miss Lucy's grave. It's out in the yard under that big oak tree. Marse Burton wouldn't have her put way off. Then he put up a fence around it and made a seat inside of the palin's and he used to set there a heap when she first died. When the baby was big enough, I used to take him out thar and let him play round while I set and patched my clothes. Seem like it was a heap er company fer us both. That chile growed up on his mother's grave. . . . But you wouldn't think it, would you? He always was a sassy, rollickin' thing. . . . But then—he never did know. Ah-h, Lord. . . . I reckon he won't be the same when he does. Maybe it'll take all the *boy* feelin' out er him like it did with Marse Burton." She wiped her eyes and shook her head.

When Burton Gilmer came she had her answer ready for him. And she gave it as they rode slowly toward the ridge road. It made her heart ache to see how worn

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and haggard he looked. She could well guess what those hours of waiting had been. On her decision hung Neil's future, and Neil was his child.

"You have left this with me," she said, "and you must abide by my decision. I have weighed it all carefully, as you said I must, and—*I am not going to tell them.*"

His hand, which had held the reins with a grasp of iron, grew limp.

"I couldn't break this off if I wanted to—and I *don't* want to. There is no living soul to whom I would sooner trust Bess's happiness than to Neil. Whatever his father was, he himself is good and manly and true."

He bowed assent without speaking.

"She will never give him up—for a reason like this—and she is right. A girl marries a man—not his family, nor his position. And if they would go on with this engagement anyway—as I am sure they would—why cast upon them the blighting knowledge of this thing? I can't do it. It is useless—and cruel. . . . Mr. Gilmer, let us keep this secret between ourselves—for ever—a sacred trust, never to be betrayed."

She frankly put out her hand to seal the contract, and he held it in a powerful grip.

"God bless you, child!" he said, when he released it. And the burden of all these silent years was unloosed and rolled from him like Christian's pack.

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XXVI

NEIGHBOURHOOD DOINGS

THEY saw much of one another as the weeks went by—Eleanor Dinwoody and Burton Gilmer—despite the fact that spring is not a leisure season in the country.

The secret they shared was a bond between them. It was never adverted to; as Eleanor had said, this was a knowledge to be buried in their own breasts and never resurrected. But it was not forgotten. Much dwelling upon it gave her a new comprehension of his character. He had sacrificed much—his whole life, in fact—letting youth and its pleasures go by without a murmur—the friendship of man and the love of woman. More than this, he had renounced his professional career. She knew from the little he had said and the much that remained unsaid how deep that had cut. If he had lived the life of a hermit it was not from an idle whim.

She found her heart welling up with pity and understanding. A thing like this would be a bitter blow to a high-spirited young man just entering life. But was it this that had given him his hatred of women? It hardly seemed possible. . . . What was that other thing Aunt Ailsy had hinted at—the thing that had occurred in St. Louis and left him so hard and bitter? Could it have

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been something more than giving up his ambitions? Eleanor did not find her thoughts entirely occupied with her garden and her vineyard that spring, absorbing as these were.

On his part, Burton Gilmer was finding it something of a struggle to retain his lifelong attitude toward women. The high wall he had so implacably reared between them and himself seemed to have been undermined. The structure was slipping, and it was not in the power of his hand to hold it. The concern with which he noted this was not unmixed with a kind of grim amusement.

He had gone to Eleanor Dinwoody with his story, goaded by an imperative sense of honour which forbade his withholding it. He had not doubted that when it was told she would turn from him with averted face; that the whole bitter truth would eventually be forced upon Neil, and the boy's happiness wrecked in the beginning, as his own had been. That it had not resulted so was a miracle which he contemplated with infinite relief and gratitude.

Since then he had fallen into the habit of watching her for other surprises, and not without solicitude. From the first he had had a harrowing fear that when the reaction came she would regret what she had done—what she had promised. He studied her for signs of it. That she was not happy he felt sure, and a torturing belief that the reason for this was to be found in a change of attitude toward this thing between them took possession of him.

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But he was wrong in this, as might have been gathered from the following letter to Madge Dixon, announcing the engagement.

"Madge, the inevitable has happened. Bess and Neil Gilmer have fallen in love and, to make a long story short, are now engaged. Isn't the spontaneity of young people's love the most astonishing thing? I suppose if a girl of nineteen (Bess is nearly that) should be marooned on a desert island there would immediately be raised up from the clods or the breakers a young male who would announce himself as the one long waiting for her—and *prove it*. Now you and I are immune—or I am. I still have my doubts about you.

"I thought when I brought Bess down to the wilderness that I should be free from troubles of this kind at least; I had visions of our settling down in time, two old maids, to comfortable cultivation of tea and cats, and the care of other people's children,—which, when the truth is told and justice done, is what occupies this maligned class far more than either beverages or felines. But it was not to be. Bess is too young and pretty.

"You will be glad to know that I heartily approve. Neil Gilmer is a fine young man, clean and straight and unusually attractive. I believe he will make her a good husband, and in these days that is something, let me tell you. I had some feeling of responsibility at first, and some qualms, but I am sure now it is going to be all right.

"They will not be married for a year or two. They are young and can afford to wait. The boys are pleased at the prospect of having Neil for a brother-in-law, and he is ready to do his part by them. I think they rather

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like the idea of a male boss. But Juddie has chosen me. That warms my heart a little. The plan is for Neil eventually to take this place, enlarge the house so that there will be room for us all, and he and the boys to work the vineyard and his farm together. This is *their* plan, not mine. I say nothing about it, but I have not the slightest notion of living with them. When I settle down finally to tea and cats it will be in a home of my own, even if it must be one room in a boarding-house. . . . Ah, well! it is a whole year off at the least. Something may happen before then. As a friend of mine always says, 'I may die in the meantime.' Short views of life are the best. That was what I told Mrs. Padgett; but such things seem so much more applicable to other people than to ourselves.

"The Padgetts are building. I don't know where the money is coming from but I have my suspicions. Mr. Padgett is getting well and strong, and is succeeding with his chicken farm. He and Burton Gilmer are concocting some scheme for better transportation facilities. We hope for a railroad some time, but in the meantime they are going to try to do something at co-operation in getting their crops to market. Mr. Burson has always said that Burton Gilmer could do a great deal here if he would only take hold of things. Something seems to have given him impetus lately.

"I hear rumors of new settlers coming in. The neighbourhood certainly is picking up. Mr. Rand tells me he hopes in a year or two more to have a church building. And, speaking of Mr. Rand,—Madge, I have something to tell you. I have been asked to be chief assistant in this missionary field! That is about what it amounts to, though incidentally I would be a wife also.

"I suppose I ought to have felt greatly complimented—

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but I didn't. I felt indignant. How would you like to be asked to marry a man because you could help him in his work—even if that work is some high calling? I would rather be chosen for myself. It is like an ardent wooer telling you he wants you because he thinks you would make a good stepmother!

"The trouble with Willis Rand is that he is primarily a preacher and only secondarily a lover. And that is a kind of cold-storage affection that I don't really care for—even if I am on the shady side of thirty and supposed to be through with romance. I'll pass that kind over to you. . . . Yes, Willis is the one I was going to give you. I am sure of it now. The other one I shall never have a chance to dispose of.

"Madge, I heard such a funny story the other day about a funeral. About half a dozen of us had gone over to Mrs. Fry's, back here in the woods, to help her with her sewing. She had been sick and had got behind. I took over my machine, Bess was cutter, and we finished up a quantity of work for her—just as our grandmothers used to do for their neighbours.

"The women were full of talk about a funeral some of them had attended a few days before, and here is the story:

"It seems that a year or more ago a Mr. Heel had died, leaving a widow, several children, and a most malodorous name. Mrs. Sutton remarked in this connection 'Hit 'pears like the Lord would a-tuk him long ago ef he had been in a shape to a-went.'

"It seemed to be the consensus of opinion that Mr. Heel was in bad shape to go even when the call came, but that is a summons none can evade—and he went. The funeral was postponed for a year, which is a common occurrence down here where ministers are not always ob-

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tainable and roads are difficult. This was hurried up at the last, I believe, because the widow wanted to marry again and thought it more seemly to appear in her widow's weeds.

"It happened that the preacher was a stranger to the family and a little deaf. The neighbour who entertained him and furnished data for the next day's discourse—for they still feel here that a funeral sermon must be a critical review of the deceased's life, character, and *prospects*—dwelled much on the virtues of the wife, but threw a mantle of charitable silence over the husband.

"When the hour came the schoolhouse was crowded, and the widow sat with her children on the front seat, clothed in deepest black and looking, Mrs. Sutton said, 'for all the world like the wife of one of them old epistles.' The discourse began, and it was soon evident that the preacher's wires were crossed. He dilated on the virtues of the deceased whose untimely death they were called to mourn, and held him up as a shining example of a faithful companion, a devoted parent, a kind neighbour, a hard worker who ate not the bread of idleness, etc., etc.

"The congregation had been half stupefied at first, but as he proceeded they looked at each other and gasped. *Jim Heel had been noted for the absence of just these traits.* There were tightly closed lips, shaking heads, and looks of astonishment all over the house,—but when he was pronounced an exemplary Christian—this carousing, swearing, quarrelsome man—it was a little too much. A brother rose, beckoned the minister to bend his good ear, and whispered in it.

"What he heard did not feaze the reverend gentleman in the least. 'I am informed,' he said cheerfully, 'that a mistake has been made in the sex of the deceased, but

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that need not cause us any embarrassment. What has been said of our sister who remains,'—with a wave of the hand toward the embarrassed lady in black—'will apply equally to our brother who is gone.'

"Then, the women unite in saying, a stage whisper came from the back of the church, from no less a person than the prospective successor of the deceased, indeed, 'Well, it don't—by a darned sight!'

"But the preacher did not hear if the congregation did, and the eulogy proceeded to its long-drawn end.

"Madge, I am dreadfully down-hearted to-day. That's why I am telling you all this nonsense. . . . How would you like for me to go back to Chicago? Not this year but next, maybe. I don't think it will be best for me to live with Bess and Neil. They are entitled to their life and I am entitled to mine, and no two sets of people can live independent lives in the same house—especially when one of them has fallen irremediably into the habit of 'bossing.' I *think* I will go back to Chicago, and take Juddie with me. He will be old enough to go to school then, and I can't cut myself off from every human tie.

"I wish you would see about the prospects of my getting back my place in the school, will you? With Neil to manage the vineyard and Bess the house there will be nothing for me but the school, and if teaching is to be my portion I suppose it had better be where I can make something at it. Still, I *should* like to see what I could do with these boys and girls. . . . Heigh-ho! How evanescent are all things earthly!

"Faithfully,

"NELL."

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XXVII

"VENGEANCE IS MINE"

ELEANOR DINWOODY had ridden to the post-office to mail this letter and was returning. She paused irresolutely as she reached her own gate and then rode on. There was no reason why she should go in yet, and the fresh new green of the woods called her. There was a restlessness upon her in these latter days that nothing but long stretches of open country seemed to quiet. She needed Nature's healing, or some other kind, for while she would not acknowledge it even to herself she was feeling a little soreness at the heart sometimes, in spite of all she could do. Bess needed her so little now. Even the boys were so pleased to think of having Neil to direct things after a while. Only Juddie clung to her as of old. . . . It was perfectly right and natural—she wouldn't have it otherwise if she could—but still—it was a little hard. . . . Well, there was always the school in Chicago. . . .

She had passed the Padgett place and was nearing the road leading to Crow's Roost—one which would be forever associated in her memory with that midnight ride she had taken over it clinging to Burton Gilmer. An almost irresistible impulse came over her to turn into it—to ride past the stone house on the crest of the hill.

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Burton Gilmer was away—she had heard him say he would be that afternoon—and she would only ride by, anyway. Of course she would not see him—she would not go if he was to be at home—it was only to see the house at this time of the year. What a beautiful place that could be made—with porticos and massive stone steps in keeping with it, and clinging vines covering its bare walls as the old English houses had them.

But when she came to the fork that led off to Crow's Roost she did not take it. She resolutely turned her back upon it. She would go on up the "big road" past the brow of the hill and down on the other side, and so on to the river road. She was just past the fork when it seemed to her she heard her own name. She stopped to listen. Distinctly could be heard the cry, "Miss Eleanor! . . . *Oh,* Miss Eleanor!"

Turning, she went back to the Crow's Roost road. There far back among the trees she descried a figure. It was Aunt Ailsy, spent and breathless from her hurried walk. She galloped her horse toward her, feeling a certainty of trouble ahead.

"What is it, Aunt Ailsy?" she cried.

"Oh, Miss Eleanor, for God's sake, come! I was jes' goin' fer you. Marse Burton's gwineter kill that man! And you's the onliest one can do anything with him."

"What man? What are you talking about?" said Eleanor, sharply.

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"That one what he done swored he'd kill. Oh, my Lord! . . . come quick, Miss Eleanor!"

"How long has this man been there?"

"He's jes' come. Look like he's all wored out with some sorter misery. I lef' him on the baid, and started fer you."

"Is Neil there?'

"No'm. They ain't nobody thar but jes' this man. And ef he an't daid now he will be soon! Marse Burton gwine kill that man, Miss Eleanor! . . . Oh, my Lord!"

"Cut across the field," said Eleanor, "and hurry all you can. I'll go on by the road. Perhaps I can get there before he does."

Down the road she went, urging her horse to his utmost speed. A great fear was tugging at her heart. This was no idle threat of Burton Gilmer's. He was not that kind of man. If he reached the house unprepared and came suddenly upon this man, there would be murder. . . . And after murder—what? Her heart stood still. Perhaps in that moment it was revealed to her what disaster to Burton Gilmer would mean for her.

If only she could get there first!

She was nearly up to the gate and going at unabated speed when, coming from the opposite direction at a leisurely pace, she descried Mr. Gilmer. He was looking at his corn fields on the right and evidently did not see her. She reigned up her horse under the branching boughs of an immense walnut tree that stood by the gate,

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hoping he would not see her and hasten to her. In the distance she could see Aunt Ailsy plowing across the field on the other side.

Mr. Gilmer was taking a leisurely survey of his crops, stopping now and then to inspect more closely a few places where the corn was scant. But it was a good stand. His face as he came toward her showed Eleanor that he was at peace with himself and the world. He stopped short at sight of her, under the walnut. Aunt Ailsy was just coming into the yard.

"Well!" he said with manifest pleasure, "to what do I owe this good fortune?"

"Mr. Gilmer," she said, "please help me down." It seemed ghastly to hear him jest.

He reached his arms out and lifted her down. "What is it?" he asked, quickly. "Do you need me for something?"

"No. I came because I was afraid you would need me."

He fastened the horses before he spoke. When he turned to her again his face was gray. "Now," he said, "tell me."

She took hold of his arm with both hands. "Mr. Gilmer, there's trouble ahead of us. Let me keep close to you."

He looked from her to Aunt Ailsy. "Trouble?" he repeated. Before he could say more the front door opened and Neil came toward them. He hardly cast a look toward the two women, apparently did not see them,

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but went straight to Mr. Gilmer. His face was ghastly.

"Uncle," he asked in a tense voice, "is this true? Is this man my father?"

"What man?" Burton Gilmer turned from him to Aunt Ailsy, with an unspoken question on his lips and every drop of blood gone from his face.

The old woman bowed her head. "It's him, Marse Burton. Oh, Lord-d, it's him! But, honey——"

He threw off Eleanor's hands and strode past her, past them all, on to the house and into the room where the man was. They followed, expecting—two of them at least—nothing less than a tragedy. Eleanor kept close at his side, remembering the words he had spoken, but he did not notice her.

When they were inside, he stopped short at the sight of the white-faced, gasping creature on the couch,—a man of about his own age but looking twenty years older, and with death written in every line of his face. She knew what was in his mind at that awful moment. He had bitter provocation for hatred of this man! and he had nursed it assiduously; over the dead body of his young sister he had sworn that some day her wrongs should be avenged; if ever this man, her betrayer, were delivered into his hand it should be a life for a life; and in his rage he had defied the Almighty to stay his hand. Now —his grip was on his enemy's throat—but *God had shaken it off.*

The girl dropped back. No need now of a restraining hand. This was the last act of the drama, and one glance

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at the livid face on the pillow showed that it would soon be played out.

Burton Gilmer folded his arms and looked down at the helpless figure before him. There was no pity in his heart; his mouth was stern and set; in his eyes a gleam of hate flamed between the narrowed lids. He was oblivious of everything and everybody but the wretch cringing before him—the man he had waited for twenty-two years.

"So!" he said deliberately and with biting emphasis, "you have come—at last."

"Yes." The word came faintly.

"Why?"

Like a demand in the day of judgment the monosyllable fell.

"I am a dying man, Burton—a dying man. Surely it is but natural—that I should wish—before I go——" his breath was laboured—"to see—my son."

"Your *son?* . . . You are late—remembering—that you have a son!"

The words were spoken with such slow and biting irony that the man cowered before them. He put his hand to his heart with a repressed groan, and Burton Gilmer stepping to a cupboard in the wall took down a flask and poured brandy in a glass and brought it to him.

"Take this," he said. It was a command and the sick man obeyed. Eleanor, watching the face that bent over him, perceived almost with horror that this was not the

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compassion of the physician, but a determination of the avenger not to be cheated of his prey. In a moment he said,

"Who told you about—*your son?*"

"John Hardeman."

"Ah-h!" The words seemed wrung from him. "John Hardeman is false too, is he? I had thought there was one man in the world that could be trusted. . . . Why did you go to him?"

"I went—to have him—make my will. I wanted to do —justice—at last, Burton."

"Where is that will?"

Uncompromising as was the tone, the man turned eagerly from the subject of himself to that of a legal instrument.

"In Hardeman's safe. He would not tell me where you were—until he had it there."

Mr. Gilmer smiled grimly.

"That was like Hardeman. *He* knew you too."

"I wanted—to do justice—to my son——"

Before he finished Neil interposed.

"Uncle, in God's name, tell me—is this man my father?"

"Yes."

"And my mother"—it was an anguished cry—"my mother! Was she a good woman?"

"Yes!" Burton Gilmer thundered, "a good woman, though all the world should deny it. . . . But this man"—he shook his clenched hand in the pallid face

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looking up into his—"this man was a fiend in human shape!"

The man put up a warding hand. "Don't—don't strike me, Burton. I am too far—gone—for that."

Burton Gilmer's lip curled.

"Strike you? . . . You? Ah-h no! You came too late for that. You took care—to come too late! I would as soon think of throttling a baby! . . . You are safe, Le Moyne, from bodily harm. But before you die," —his hand clenched again and the words poured impetuously from his lips—"before you die, I am going to denounce you before this boy—your son—the son you have come at this late hour to claim—as the betrayer of his mother!"

Neil staggered back as from a blow and Eleanor put her arms about him. But he hardly perceived it, for the man on the couch was protesting feebly.

"I married her, Gilmer."

"*You lie!*"

"I have proof."

"Proof? . . . Give it to me then!"

With shaking fingers the sick man took from his wallet a worn, discoloured paper, yellow with age, and handed it to his pitiless adversary, his eyes turning in mute entreaty from him to the boy who stood watching his uncle.

As he read, a change wondrous to see came over the face of Burton Gilmer. It was plain that he did not doubt the genuineness of this document, whatever it was.

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Infinite relief crept into his face, mingled with a look of yearning tenderness. But a moment later, folding the paper up and thrusting it into his own pocket, he was the stern judge again.

"Where has this certificate been through all these years?" he demanded.

"Safe—in my keeping."

"In *your* keeping? Why was it not given to her?"

"I felt—that it would be—better—with me," faltered the man.

"Ah-h! it was like you! . . . Was this marriage recorded?"

"I suppose so. It was in another county. We had gone—for a long drive——"

Again did Burton Gilmer's hand clutch the air as if he felt a throat within its grasp.

"You hound!" he said. "*You hound!*"

Then slowly, as if summing up an indictment, "You came to my home, a trusted friend; and you betrayed that friendship—a dastard's act. You met my sister—my sweet, pure little girl"—there was a break in his voice then—"you took advantage of my absence to worm yourself into her affections, you a man of the world against whom a child could not cope; you enticed her into a secret marriage—*the devil's own agency for blackening a woman's character*—and you did it"—his fist was smiting the air in the other's face—"you did it—because you knew that in no other way could you gain your end; and then—oh, Le Moyne, it was a hellish deed—you took

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from her the only thing that could prove her virtue, and —in her hour of need—deserted her and your unborn child. Why! . . . the devils in hell could do no worse than this!"

The man on the couch seemed to shrivel up before the blast of his anger.

"I know it! I know it!" he moaned. "I sinned against her—and my own soul. But I meant to go back, Burton. I did—I did. But you took her away, and I had no means of knowing where. Then I saw in a Memphis paper that she had died,—in the West, the paper said."

"Yes. I sent that notice to Hardeman. I wanted her to drop out of the world's remembrance as she had out of yours."

There was a moment of silence and then the sick man took up again his pleading for mercy.

"I sinned against her, Burton, but I have repented—oh, bitterly repented. I have been a wretched man, Gilmer."

"Repented?" went on the accusing voice. "Of what good is your repentance? Will it bring her back from the grave where you sent her? Can it take away the black stain from her pure name that you put there? Will it give to her child the right to lift up his head where she was known—in that world where he rightfully belongs? . . . Until it can do these things—don't talk to me about your *repentance!*"

The man at the bar wrung his hands.

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"I can't undo the past—God knows I would if I could! But I am here to atone—to make such reparation as I can. I am a rich man, Burton, a rich man. And all I have shall be his."

Mr. Gilmer turned to his nephew. If he had intended to be some impartial go-between his manner would not have been different.

"He offers you money, Neil," he said with a wave of the hand, as if he were setting forth the advantage of some rare bargain, "money—in exchange for your mother's good name . . . money!"

"More than that," panted the man, his breath coming hard again—"he shall take my name—an honoured one—in my State."

"And he will give you a name, Neil—at last—*at last!* And we have his word for it that it is an *honoured* name! The one you bear is only *honest* and *honourable*—thank God, this paper shows it is that—but his is an *honoured* name! Well"—he made a gesture of renunciation—"it is for you to choose." Turning, he stood with folded arms and averted face.

The man on the couch stretched out his hands to Neil. There was no doubting his sincerity now nor the yearning in his gesture. The ties of blood are strong in the hour of death. It is a bitter thing to embark on that last voyage without one hand-clasp from our own.

"My son!" he said piteously, "you will not spurn me? Surely you will not spurn me! I am a broken man

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—a dying man—and"—with a supreme effort—"I am your father, boy! Your father!"

For the space of a minute—it seemed hours—no sound was heard. Eleanor stood breathless. Aunt Ailsy in the background was shaking her head mournfully in protest. From the window where he stood Neil Gilmer could see the roses on his mother's grave. Beside him stood the man who had given him a parent's devotion. The years rose up before him mutely. Then he spoke—slowly and solemnly—as if he were pronouncing sentence:

"My father? . . . No. . . . You are but the man that gave me life." He stepped to his uncle's side and laid a firm hand on his shoulder. "This is my father. He gave me a name—by adoption. I never knew why until to-day. It is his name I will bear to the end."

It was beautiful to see Burton Gilmer at that moment. Surely this was reward for his years of sacrifice. Not a muscle moved. Only by his heaving breast and his dilating nostrils was his emotion made manifest. But his face was transfigured.

It really seemed as if the man on the couch had expected Neil to fall on his neck at the plaintive reiteration of the claims of parenthood, for at the boy's words he dropped back with a faint cry, his hand again on his heart.

They crowded about him—Eleanor, Neil, and Aunt Ailsy, raising him up, fanning him, plying him with brandy, and doing all the other futile things that people

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do in such emergencies. But it was useless. The strain of the long journey, the exciting interview, and this final disappointment—were too much for his weakened heart. At last Burton Gilmer pushed them aside and put his ear to the man's breast.

"Leave him in peace," he said in an awed tone, "he is dead."

Neil was despatched for Mr. Burson, who was the coroner, and at Mr. Gilmer's request Eleanor remained until they came. The two women were left alone with the dead man. Looking from the window at the back of the room Eleanor could see Burton Gilmer standing with bowed head at the grave in the yard under the big oak.

When Mr. Burson came the story was soon told. The man was one he had known years before, Mr. Gilmer said briefly. He had come here to see him, evidently suffering from heart trouble (*angina pectoris,* probably) and the fatigue of the journey and the excitement of the meeting were too much for him. Miss Dinwoody had happened to be here at the time and was present when he suddenly expired. Which Miss Dinwoody confirmed.

Mr. Burson decided that it was not a case for an inquest and asked for instructions. Would he be buried in the new graveyard?

"No," said Mr. Gilmer, "Neil and I will take his remains home to New Orleans. Send Mr. Honn over at once."

Neil looked surprised but said nothing. He was accustomed to having his uncle take the lead, and this time

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there was no remonstrance. He took Eleanor home, and on the way they talked it all over.

"You knew this before?" he asked.

"Yes. Your uncle told me the day after you asked Bess to marry you."

"And you consented in spite of it."

"Yes, Neil. I believed *you* to be thoroughly good. That's the important thing."

"Aunt Nell," he said, with decision, "you are *never* to leave us!"

"You will tell Bess?" she said, interrogatively, after a while, sure of the answer.

"Yes. There has been enough of secrecy in my life. There shall never be any between Bess and me."

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XXVIII

THE STORY TOLD

A FORTNIGHT had gone by before they returned. During that time Bess had daily letters from Neil, but they were not of a character to be shared, and Eleanor had only the skeleton of an itinerary to satisfy her craving for news. But the two men were much in the minds of the two maids, and in their conversation as well. All that Burton Gilmer had told her Eleanor related circumstantially to Bess.

"It was to save you pain, dear, that I did not tell you then," she said, a little wistfully, for she felt latent reproach in her niece's look.

"Your motive was right, Aunt Nell; but I don't know that people always have the right to spare their friends pain. The result would have been the same, but it would have been my sacrifice. And I should have been glad to make it for Neil."

When they came back Burton Gilmer went straight to Eleanor, as the younger man did to Bess. "I have come to take you to drive," he said, and when they had started turned his horses' heads toward Crow's Roost.

It was as they sat beside the grave under the spreading oak, facing the glories of the setting sun, that the story was told. She had learned of the journey as they drove

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over—of their going to Hardeman, hunting up the record of the marriage, reading the will,—of his going to New Orleans with them and directing things there.

"He was buried in the tomb of his fathers in Metairie Cemetery," Mr. Gilmer said. "There were no relatives to mourn over him, and, what was more to Hardeman's purpose and mine, none to contest the will. Le Moyne was an only child and had inherited a considerable property. This comes to Neil, as is right. I have no scruples whatever about his retaining my name and taking his father's money. That was all the reparation he could make him. I am firmly convinced that when he left Memphis he never intended to return, though he insisted, in talking to Hardeman, that he did. Justice was meted out to him in this life. He married a woman who made his home a hell on earth, he told Hardeman. She died only a few years ago. They had no children.

"I am glad to find that Neil has no leaning toward city life from this brief experience. That would have been a grief to me. But this is home to him, as it is to me now. The money that comes to him he can use here, he says. He has some schemes which this will enable him to carry out. You will be glad, I am sure, that he will not think of taking your niece away from you."

"Yes," she said, faintly, thinking of Chicago. They sat in silence then, watching the sun go down behind the distant hills across the river—a red ball of fire. Then he reached over for a cluster of the "Baltimore Belle" and sat toying with it.

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"There is another story I want to tell you," he said. "You may have heard of my antipathy to women. I understand it is a stock subject of conversation in the neighbourhood."

"I have heard of it," she said, quietly. "Neil himself told me once that you had managed, consciously or unconsciously, to make him all his life think slightingly of women."

"I have," he admitted, "I have thought poorly of women myself and I have endeavoured to instil the same feeling into him. I hoped in this way to keep him free from the snare of female influence, but in such a way that he would feel it to be an instinctive rather than an acquired distrust. I had been given a wrong bias in this matter that became in time almost an obsession. To me in those days all women were either faithless or frail. I felt that nothing could so enhance his happiness as keeping clear of them. I had him pretty well indoctrinated too; but in a twinkling my work was undone—by a pretty face."

"Do you regret it?" she asked, quickly.

"No. Not now. That spell has been broken."

"What ever gave you this feeling about women?" she asked, curiously. "You don't seem to me like the kind of man that would be either narrow or unjust."

"I had a bitter experience once," he said. "It warped my whole nature, I think. It seems absurd to me now that I should have let it affect me as it did, but I was

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young then, and proud and passionate. Such people don't take disappointment very philosophically. I want you to know about that. I want you to know to-day everything I know, good or bad, about the Gilmers."

She made no reply. It was coming—this thing she had wanted so much to know.

"I have told you of my state of mind when I first learned my sister's story and of my fruitless search for Gaston Le Moyne. My grief and despair were not entirely on her account. In St. Louis was a girl to whom I was engaged to be married,—one in whose love and fidelity I believed as I believed in my God. One of the bitterest drops wrung out to me in that day was that I could no longer bring to her an unstained name. It was imperative that I should go to her at once, tell her the truth, and offer to release her from our engagement. But as I travelled toward her a ray of light appeared through the blackness of darkness that surrounded me. She had made many protestations to me—this girl—had wished that some opportunity would arise to test her love, to my satisfaction.

"Those things came back to me. All was not lost yet, if only she would stand by me. We could be married and go to Vienna—I had talked of going there to study—and take Lucy and Aunt Ailsy with us—this was the plan that formulated itself in my mind as the train rushed toward St. Louis. But it all depended upon her. If only she would stand by me!

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"Well, she didn't stand by me. I told my story, offered her her freedom, and she promptly accepted it. I ought not to have expected anything else. It was too severe a test; I know that now. But it was hard on me. I went from her stunned and blinded by the blow. I went back to Memphis, got my sister, and brought her up here. When she died I shut women out of my life."

She broke the silence after a time. "But you don't feel this way about women now, surely?"

"No," he said, "not now." And then, after another silence, "I met another woman years afterwards. She had not as beautiful a face as the first one had, but she had a different soul. She did not talk much about sacrifices, but she made them continually. Nor did she prate of love; she only gave it, and gave lavishly. Hers was a kind of vivifying love; it warmed into life all it fell upon. And she was so unconscious of it; that was one of its greatest charms. There never seemed anything wonderful to her about what she herself did. You see she was not self-centered like the first one."

"Perhaps you did not put her to a test as you did the other." Somehow she felt herself arrayed against this second woman and full of pity for the first, who had been so young and beautiful.

"Yes, I put her to a test. But she stood it. She was of different calibre from the other." He was looking at her half-quizzically, but her eyes were turned away.

"Where did you meet her?"

"Here."

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"Here?" she repeated, amazed. "Where is she now?"

"Sitting beside me." He smiled into her eyes as the red blood rose to her face and overspread it. "And she has so little self-consciousness that she doesn't even recognize herself."

Then his voice grew tender.

"Why, child, don't you know it is you that has broken this evil spell? How could I watch you, study you, as I have done ever since that day you knelt by Juddie's couch with your arms about the helpless little child you were mothering, and not feel my faith in womanhood flowing back. My own mother has seemed closer to me since I have known you; my thoughts of my dead sister tenderer. I thought the old homely virtues had failed from the world, but you have taught me they are still here—only I have been too blind to see them.

"And, Eleanor,"—a thrill shot through her at the name; he had never called her that but once and then they were standing under the shadow of averted death and all formalities were stripped away—"that isn't all you have done for me. You have taught me I still have power to love. I thought that was gone."

He bent over and took her unresisting hand.

"Child, I love you,—love you and want you for my very own. This isn't the passion of a boy but the steadfast love of a man. Do you think you could ever learn to care for a grizzled old fellow like me?"

For what seemed a long time she was silent. When at

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last she looked up to speak he said huskily, "Perhaps you'd better not give me your answer now. Take time to think it over. Take all the time you need."

Nobody ever expected Eleanor Dinwoody to do just as other women might. She looked up at him saucily, but with brimming eyes. His patience and gentleness touched her.

"I don't need any time," she said. "I have learned how already."

And he gathered her to him.

The glories of the afterglow had come and gone, she and Juddie had been safely settled at Crow's Roost, and many practical details arranged before she said, apropos of nothing, "I'm glad you want me for myself."

"Did Willis want you for your help?" he asked.

"Why!"—she began, amazed—"who told you anything——"

"Oh, I've known it from the first. It was foregone. Well, Rand is a good fellow. He is a better man than I am——"

"Yes," she agreed, cheerfully.

"But"—he tightened his hold upon her—"he didn't get you! he didn't get you!"

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XXIX

A POSTSCRIPT

THE VINEYARD, June ——.

DEAR MADGE:—I am writing just a line to tell you not to do anything further about the Chicago matter. I don't think I shall go back. I have definitely changed my mind. In a few days I will write you all about it, but in the meantime I shall leave you guessing. Ha, ha! . . . Yes, I am going to stay in the Ozarks. I love these hills and valleys and all the people in my vineyard. Why shouldn't I? I have found here home, and friends, and happiness in the love of a good man. That's the best there is in life, after all. I'm not going back to rows of brick and mortar—and strangers. No, Madge, dear,

"My heart's in the Highlands."

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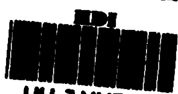

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